

DESCRIPTION

FLICKER REDUCTION METHOD, IMAGE PICKUP DEVICE AND FLICKER
REDUCTION CIRCUIT

5

Technical Field

The present invention relates to a method for reducing
a fluorescent light flicker occurring in a video signal from
an XY addressing type scanning image pickup element (an
10 imager or an image sensor) such as a CMOS (complementary
metal oxide semiconductor) image pickup element when a
subject is photographed by the image pickup element under
light of a fluorescent lamp, an image pickup device, such as
a video camera or a digital still camera employing the XY
15 addressing type scanning image pickup element such as the
CMOS image pickup element, and a flicker reduction circuit
for use in the image pickup device.

Background Art

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When a subject is photographed by a video camera under
an illumination of a fluorescent lamp directly operated from
commercial AC power, chronological brightness level
variations in a video signal as an image output, i.e., a
fluorescent light flicker occurs due to a difference between
25 the frequency (twice the frequency of the commercial AC

power) of a luminance change (light intensity change) of the fluorescent lamp and a vertical synchronization frequency of the camera.

For example, in a zone where the frequency of the commercial AC power is 50 Hz, a subject may be photographed by a CCD camera of an NTSC method (at a 60 Hz vertical synchronization frequency) under the illumination of the non-inverter fluorescent lamp. In such a case as shown in Fig. 28, one field frequency is 1/60 second while the period of the luminance change of the fluorescent lamp is 1/100 second. The exposure timing at each field drifts with respect to variations in the luminance of the fluorescent lamp, and an amount of exposure light at each pixel changes from field to field.

If the exposure time is 1/60 second, the amount of exposure light is different within the same exposure time from duration a1 to duration a2 to duration a3, and when the exposure time is shorter than 1/60 second (but not 1/100 second), the amount of exposure light time is different within the same exposure from duration b1 to duration b2 to duration b3.

Since the exposure timing responsive to the luminance change of the fluorescent lamp reverts back to the original timing every three fields, the brightness level variation due to flickering is repeated every three fields. More

specifically, the luminance ratio of each field (the appearance of a flicker) changes within an exposure period, but the period of flickering remains unchanged.

In a progressive camera such as a digital camera, the
5 brightness level variation is repeated every three frames if the vertical synchronization frequency is 30 Hz.

To emit white light, a plurality of fluorescent lamps, for example, a red fluorescent lamp, a green fluorescent lamp, and a blue fluorescent lamp are typically used.

10 Fluorescent materials for these lamps have unique persistence characteristics thereof, and for a duration of time from a stop of discharging to a subsequent start of discharging, light emission decays in accordance with the persistence characteristics. During this duration of time,
15 light appearing white at first decays while the hue thereof changes at the same time. If the exposure timing drifts, not only the brightness level variations but also the hue change occurs. Since the fluorescent lamp has unique spectral characteristics that a strong peak is present in a
20 particular wavelength, a variable component of a signal becomes different from color to color.

The color hue change and the difference in the variable component from color to color lead to a so-called color flicker.

25 As shown in the bottom portion of Fig. 28, the amount

of exposure light remains constant regardless of the exposure timing if the exposure time is set to be an integer multiple of periods (1/100 second) of the luminance variation of the fluorescent lamp. No flicker then occurs.

5 It is contemplated that illumination of the fluorescent lamp is detected through signal processing of a camera in response to an operation of a user, and that the exposure time is set to be an integer multiple of 1/100 second under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp. In this
10 arrangement, a simple method can fully control the generation of the flickering.

 However, since this method does not allow the exposure time to be set to any value, the freedom of the exposure amount adjustment means for obtaining an appropriate amount
15 of exposure is reduced.

 A method for reducing the fluorescent light flicker under any shutter speed (exposure time) is thus required.

 An image pickup device having all pixels in one frame exposed at the same exposure timing, such as a CCD image
20 pickup device, offers relatively easily such a method because the brightness level variations and color variations due to the flickering appears only between fields.

 If the exposure time is not 1/100 second, the flickering has a repetition frequency of three fields as
25 shown in Fig. 28. To achieve a constant average value of

the video signal of each field, current luminance variations and current color variations are predicted from the video signal three fields before, and the gain of the video signal of each field is adjusted based on the prediction results so
5 that the flicker is reduced to a level that presents no problem in practice.

In the XY addressing type scanning image pickup device, such as a CMOS image pickup device, however, the exposure timing drifts successively from pixel to pixel by one
10 horizontal period of the reading clock (pixel clock) in a screen horizontal direction. Since all pixels are different in the exposure timing, the above-referenced method cannot suppress the flickering.

Fig. 29 illustrates such flickering. The pixels
15 successively drift in the exposure timing in the screen horizontal direction as discussed above. One horizontal period is sufficiently shorter than the period of the variation of the fluorescent light. Based on the assumption that the pixels on the same line have the same timing, the
20 exposure timing of each line in a screen vertical direction becomes something like the one shown in Fig. 29. This assumption presents no practical problem.

The exposure timing is different from line to line in the XY addressing type scanning image pickup device, such as
25 a CMOS image pickup device as shown in Fig. 29 (F1

represents such a drift in the exposure timing). Since the lines suffer from a difference in the amount of exposure light, the brightness level variation and the color variation take place due to the flickering not only between
5 fields but also within each field. A strip pattern appears on a screen (with strips thereof aligned in the horizontal direction and the density of the stripes changing in the vertical direction).

Fig. 30 illustrates an on-screen flicker if a subject
10 is a uniform pattern. Since one horizontal period (one wavelength) of the subject is $1/100$ second, a stripe pattern of 1.666 periods appears in one frame. Let M represent the number of read lines per field, and one horizontal period of the stripe pattern corresponds to the number of read lines
15 $L=M*60/100$. In this description and the drawing, an asterisk (*) represents a multiplication operation.

As shown in Fig. 31, three fields (three frames)
correspond to five periods (five wavelengths) of the stripe pattern, and if viewed continuously, the stripe pattern
20 appears to drift in a vertical direction.

Fig. 30 and Fig. 31 show only the brightness level variation due to the flicker. In practice, however, the above-described color variation also additionally appears, thereby substantially degrading image quality. The color
25 flicker, in particular, becomes pronounced as the shutter

speed becomes fast. The XY addressing type scanning image pickup device suffers more from image quality degradation because the effect of the color flicker also appears on the screen.

5 If the exposure timing is set to be an integer multiple of periods (1/100 second) of the luminance variation of the fluorescent light, the amount of exposure becomes constant regardless of the exposure timing, and a fluorescent light flicker containing an on-screen flicker does not occur.

10 With a variable electronic shutter speed feature incorporated, a CMOS image pickup device becomes complex in structure. Even in an image pickup device having the electronic shutter, the flexibility of the exposure amount adjusting means for achieving an appropriate exposure is
15 reduced if only an integer multiple of 1/100 second is set as the exposure time to prevent flickering.

 Methods for reducing the fluorescent light flickering for use in the XY addressing type scanning image pickup device, such as the CMOS image pickup device, have been
20 proposed.

 Patent document 1 (Japanese Unexamined Patent Application Publication No. 2000-350102) and patent document
2 2 (Japanese Unexamined Patent Application Publication No. 2000-23040) discloses methods of estimating a flicker
25 component by measuring an amount of light of a fluorescent

lamp with a photosensitive element or a measuring element and controlling a gain of a video signal from an image pickup element in response to the estimation result.

Patent document 3 (Japanese Unexamined Patent

5 Application Publication No. 2001-16508) discloses another technique. In accordance with the disclosed technique, two types of images are taken in two conditions, namely, a first electronic shutter value appropriate for a current ambient illumination condition and in a second electronic shutter
10 value having a predetermined relationship to a light and dark cycle of a fluorescent lamp, a flicker component is estimated by comparing the two signals, and a gain of a video signal from an image pickup device is controlled in response to the estimation results.

15 Patent document 4 (Japanese Unexamined Patent Application Publication No. 11-164192) discloses another technique. In accordance with the disclosed technique, a brightness variation under an illumination of a fluorescent lamp is recorded beforehand as a correction factor in a
20 memory, the phase of a flicker component is detected from a video signal from an image pickup device taking advantage of a difference between the frequency of a video signal component and the frequency of the flicker component, and the video signal is thus corrected in accordance with the
25 correction factor in the memory in response to the detection

results.

Patent document 5 (Japanese Unexamined Patent Application Publication No. 2000-165752) discloses another technique. In the disclosed technique, a correction
5 coefficient is calculated from two video signals that are obtained as a result of exposures performed with a time difference, the time difference causing the phase of flicker to be inverted by 180 degrees.

As disclosed in patent documents 1 and 2, the technique
10 of estimating of the flicker component by measuring the amount of light of the fluorescent lamp with the photosensitive element or the measuring element increases the size and the cost of the image pickup system because the photosensitive element or the measuring element is attached
15 to the image pickup device.

As disclosed in patent document 3, the technique of estimating the flicker component by photographing the two types of images in the different shutter conditions (exposure conditions) requires a complex system in the image
20 pickup device, and further this technique is not appropriate for taking a moving image.

The technique disclosed in patent document 4 uses the coefficient prepared beforehand in the memory as a correction signal. It is practically impossible to prepare
25 the correction coefficients for all types of fluorescent

lamps. Depending on the type of the fluorescent lamp, detecting accurately the flicker component and reducing reliably the flicker component are difficult. As disclosed in patent document 4, the technique of extracting the
5 flicker component from the video signal taking advantage of the difference between the frequencies of the video signal component and the flicker component has difficulty in detecting the flicker component distinctly from the video signal component in a black background portion and a low-
10 illuminance portion, each portion having a small amount of flicker component. If a moving image is present in a screen, performance for detecting the flicker component is substantially lowered.

As the technique disclosed in patent document 3, the
15 technique disclosed in patent document 5 for estimating the flicker component by photographing the two types of images at the different timings requires a complex system in the image pickup device and is not appropriate for taking a moving image.

20 In accordance with the present invention, a fluorescent light flicker characteristic of an XY addressing type scanning image pickup device such as a CMOS image pickup device is accurately detected and reliably and sufficiently reduced through simple signal processing without using an
25 photosensitive element regardless of the level of a video

signal of a subject and the type of a fluorescent lamp.

Disclosure of Invention

In accordance with a first aspect of the present invention, there is provided a flicker reduction method for reducing a fluorescent light flicker component in a color signal or a luminance signal obtained by photographing a subject through an XY addressing type image pickup element under an illumination of a fluorescent lamp, comprising: a step of inputting color signal or luminance signal, a step of integrating the color signal or the luminance signal, as an input image signal, with respect to each horizontal line of each color signal or said luminance signal throughout a duration of time equal to or longer than one horizontal period, a step of normalizing the integrated value or a difference value between the integrated values of adjacent fields or adjacent frames with respect to each color signal, a step of extracting a spectrum of the normalized integrated value or the normalized difference value with respect to each color signal, a step of estimating a flicker component from the extracted spectrum with respect to each color signal, and a step of performing a calculation operation on the estimated flicker component and the input image signal to cancel out the estimated flicker component with respect to each color signal.

In accordance with a second aspect of the invention, there is provided a flicker reduction method for reducing a fluorescent light flicker component in each of color signals of colors obtained by photographing a subject through an XY addressing type image pickup element under an illumination

of a fluorescent lamp, comprising: a step of inputting color signals of colors, a step of integrating the color signal of each color, as an input image signal, with respect to each horizontal line of each color signal throughout a duration of time equal to or longer than one horizontal period, a step of normalizing the integrated value or a difference value between the integrated values of adjacent fields or adjacent frames with respect to each color signal, a step of extracting a spectrum of the normalized integrated value or the normalized difference value with respect to each color signal, a step of estimating a flicker component from the extracted spectrum with respect to each color signal, and a step of performing a calculation operation on the estimated flicker component and the input image signal to cancel out the estimated flicker component with respect to each color signal.

In accordance with a third aspect of the invention, there is provided a flicker reduction method for reducing a fluorescent light flicker component in both a luminance signal and each of color signals of colors, obtained by photographing a subject through an XY addressing type image pickup element under an illumination of a fluorescent lamp, comprising: a step of inputting both luminance signal and color signals of colors, a step of integrating each of the luminance signal and the color signal of each color, as an input image signal, with respect to each horizontal line of said luminance signal and each color signal throughout a duration of time equal to or longer than one horizontal period, a step of normalizing the integrated value or a difference value between the integrated values of adjacent

fields or adjacent frames with respect to each color signal, a step of extracting a spectrum of the normalized integrated value or the normalized difference value with respect to each color signal, a step of estimating a flicker component from the extracted spectrum with respect to each color signal, and a step of performing a calculation operation on the estimated flicker component and the input image signal to cancel out the estimated flicker component with respect to each color signal.

In accordance with a fourth aspect of the invention, there is provided an image pickup device comprising: an XY addressing type image pickup element, means for inputting color signal or luminance signal, means for integrating a color signal or a luminance signal, as an input image signal, with respect to each horizontal line of each color signal or said luminance signal throughout a duration of time equal to or longer than one horizontal period, the video signal or the luminance signal being obtained by photographing a subject through the XY addressing type image pickup element, means for normalizing the integrated value or a difference value between the integrated values of adjacent fields or adjacent frames with respect to each color signal, means for extracting a spectrum of the normalized integrated value or the normalized difference value with respect to each color signal, means for estimating a flicker component from the extracted spectrum with respect to each color signal, and means for performing a calculation operation on the estimated flicker component and the input image signal to cancel out the estimated flicker component with respect to each color signal.

In accordance with a fifth aspect of the invention, there is provided an image pickup device comprising: an XY addressing type image pickup element, means for inputting color signals of colors, means for integrating a color signal of each color, as an input image signal, with respect to each horizontal line of each color signal throughout a duration of time equal to or longer than one horizontal period, the color signal being obtained by photographing a subject through the XY addressing type image pickup element, means for normalizing the integrated value or a difference value between the integrated values of adjacent fields or adjacent frames with respect to each color signal, means for extracting a spectrum of the normalized integrated value or the normalized difference value with respect to each color signal, means for estimating a flicker component from the extracted spectrum with respect to each color signal, and means for performing a calculation operation on the estimated flicker component and the input image signal to cancel out the estimated flicker component with respect to each color signal.

In accordance with a sixth aspect of the invention, there is provided an image pickup device comprising: an XY addressing type image pickup element, means for inputting both luminance signal and color signals of colors, means for integrating each of a luminance signal and a color signal of each color, as an input image signal, with respect to each horizontal line of said luminance signal and each color signal throughout a duration of time equal to or longer than one horizontal period, the video signal and the luminance signal being obtained by photographing a subject through the

XY addressing type image pickup element, means for normalizing the integrated value or a difference value between the integrated values of adjacent fields or adjacent frames with respect to each color signal, means for extracting a spectrum of the normalized integrated value or the normalized difference value with respect to each color signal, means for estimating a flicker component from the extracted spectrum with respect to each color signal, and means for performing a calculation operation on the estimated flicker component and the input image signal to cancel out the estimated flicker component with respect to each color signal.

In accordance with a seventh aspect of the invention, there is provided a flicker reduction circuit for reducing a fluorescent light flicker component in a video signal or a luminance signal obtained by photographing a subject through an XY addressing type image pickup element under an illumination of a fluorescent lamp, comprising: means for inputting color signal or luminance signal, means for integrating the color signal or the luminance signal, as an input image signal, with respect to each horizontal line of said luminance signal or each color signal throughout a duration of time equal to or longer than one horizontal period, means for normalizing the integrated value or a difference value between the integrated values of adjacent fields or adjacent frames with respect to each color signal, means for extracting a spectrum of the normalized integrated value or the normalized difference value with respect to each color signal, means for estimating a flicker component from the extracted spectrum with respect to each color

signal, and means for performing a calculation operation on the estimated flicker component and the input image signal to cancel out the estimated flicker component with respect to each color signal.

In accordance with an eighth aspect of the invention, there is provided a flicker reduction circuit for reducing a fluorescent light flicker component in each of color signals of colors obtained by photographing a subject through an XY addressing type image pickup element under an illumination of a fluorescent lamp, comprising: means for inputting color signals of colors, means for integrating the color signal of each color, as an input image signal, with respect to each horizontal line of each color signal throughout a duration of time equal to or longer than one horizontal period, means for normalizing the integrated value or a difference value between the integrated values of adjacent fields or adjacent frames with respect to each color signal, means for extracting a spectrum of the normalized integrated value or the normalized difference value with respect to each color signal, means for estimating a flicker component from the extracted spectrum with respect to each color signal, and means for performing a calculation operation on the estimated flicker component and the input image signal to cancel out the estimated flicker component with respect to each color signal.

In accordance with a ninth aspect of the invention, there is provided a flicker reduction circuit for reducing a fluorescent light flicker component in each of a luminance signal and each of color signals of colors, obtained by photographing a subject through an XY addressing type image

pickup element under an illumination of a fluorescent lamp, comprising: means for inputting both luminance signal and color signals of colors, means for integrating each of the luminance signal and the color signal of each color, as an input image signal, with respect to each horizontal line of said luminance signal and each color signal throughout a duration of time equal to or longer than one horizontal period, means for normalizing the integrated value or a difference value between the integrated values of adjacent fields or adjacent frames with respect to each color signal, means for extracting a spectrum of the normalized integrated value or the normalized difference value with respect to each color signal, means for estimating a flicker component from the extracted spectrum with respect to each color signal, and means for performing a calculation operation on the estimated flicker component and the input image signal to cancel out the estimated flicker component with respect to each color signal.

In accordance with the flicker reduction method according to embodiments of the present invention, a signal component other than a flicker component may be removed as the normalized integrated value or the normalized difference value, and a signal that allows the flicker component to be easily estimated at a high precision may be obtained from a black background portion and a low-illumination portion, each portion having a small amount of flicker component. By extracting the spectrum to an appropriate order from the normalized integrated value and the normalized difference value, the flicker component may be thus estimated at a high precision regardless of the type of a fluorescent lamp and a

luminance varied waveform even in an area where a signal component becomes discontinuous by the effect of a subject. The flicker component may be reliably and sufficiently reduced from the input image signal by performing the calculation operation on the estimated

flicker component and the input image signal.

In particular, in accordance with the above disclosed embodiments, the flicker component may be detected from the color signal of each color, obtained as the video signal, on a per color signal basis, or on a per luminance and color signal basis, and the detected flicker component may be reduced. The fluorescent light flicker containing the color flicker may thus be accurately detected and reliably and sufficiently reduced.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Fig. 1 illustrates a system configuration of an image pickup device of one embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 2 illustrates one example of a digital signal processor of a primary color system.

Fig. 3 illustrates one example of a digital signal processor of a complementary color system.

Fig. 4 illustrates a first example of a flicker reducer.

Fig. 5 illustrates one example of a calculating block taking into a saturation region.

Fig. 6 illustrates a second example of the flicker reducer.

Fig. 7 illustrates a third example of the flicker reducer.

Fig. 8 illustrates one example of the flicker reducer

under the illumination of a non-fluorescent lamp.

Fig. 9 illustrates another example of the flicker reducer under the illumination of a non-fluorescent lamp.

Fig. 10 illustrates an image pickup device that takes
5 into account a subject that changes greatly in a short period of time in response to an operation or an action of a photographer.

Fig. 11 illustrates one example of image pickup device that takes into account the flicker component reduction
10 process that becomes unnecessary depending on a photographing condition.

Fig. 12 illustrates another example of image pickup device that takes into account the flicker component reduction process that becomes unnecessary depending on a
15 photographing condition.

Fig. 13 illustrates a basic configuration to adjust an estimated flicker component.

Fig. 14 illustrates a first specific example for adjusting the estimated flicker component.

20 Fig. 15 illustrates a second specific example for adjusting the estimated flicker component.

Fig. 16 serves the purpose of explanation of Fig. 14 and Fig. 15.

Figs. 17A and 17B illustrate equations serving the
25 purpose of explanation of an example of adjusting the

estimated flicker component.

Figs. 18A and 18B illustrate equations serving the purpose of explanation of the example of adjusting the estimated flicker component.

5 Figs. 19A and 19B illustrate equations serving the purpose of explanation of the example of adjusting the estimated flicker component.

Figs. 20A - 20E illustrate equations serving the purpose of explanation of the example of adjusting the
10 estimated flicker component.

Figs. 21A - 21C illustrate equations serving the purpose of explanation of the example of adjusting the estimated flicker component.

Figs. 22A and 22B serve the purpose of explanation of
15 Fig. 8 and Fig. 9.

Fig. 23 illustrates a subject used in tests.

Fig. 24 is a plot of an integrated value of the subject of Fig. 23.

Fig. 25 is a plot of a difference value of the subject
20 of Fig. 23.

Fig. 26 is a plot of a normalized difference value of the subject of Fig. 23.

Fig. 27 is a plot of a flicker coefficient estimated for the subject of Fig. 23.

25 Fig. 28 illustrates a fluorescent light flicker of a

CCD image pickup device.

Fig. 29 illustrates a fluorescent light flicker in an XY addressing type image pickup element.

Fig. 30 illustrates a stripe pattern in one frame in the fluorescent light flicker in the XY addressing type image pickup element.

Fig. 31 illustrates a stripe pattern in three consecutive frames in the fluorescent light flicker in the XY addressing type image pickup element.

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Best Mode for Carrying Out the Invention

[Embodiments of image pickup devices: Fig. 1 - Fig. 3]

(System configuration: Fig. 1)

Fig. 1 illustrates a system configuration of one embodiment of an image pickup device in accordance with the present invention. The image pickup device is here a video camera employing a CMOS image pickup element as a XY addressing type scanning image pickup element.

In the image pickup device of this embodiment, namely, the video camera, light from a subject is incident on a CMOS image pickup device 12 via an image pickup optical system 11, and photoelectrically converted into an analog video signal by the CMOS image pickup device 12. The resulting analog video signal is thus obtained from the CMOS image pickup device 12.

The CMOS image pickup device 12 includes, on a CMOS substrate, a plurality of two-dimensionally arranged pixels, each pixel including a photodiode (a photo gate), a transfer gate (shutter transistor), a switching transistor (address transistor), an amplification transistor, a reset transistor (reset gate), etc., and further a vertical scanning circuit, a horizontal scanning circuit, and a video signal output circuit.

The CMOS image pickup device 12 may be a primary color system or a complementary color system, and the analog video signal output from the CMOS image pickup device 12 is an RGB primary color signal or a complementary color signal.

An analog signal processor 13 packaged in an IC (integrated circuit) processes the analog video signal from the CMOS image pickup device 12 on a per color signal basis, thereby sample-holding the analog video signal, gain controlling the analog video signal in an AGC (automatic gain control) process, and A/D converting the video signal into a digital signal.

The digital video signal from the analog signal processor 13 is processed by a digital signal processor 20 packaged in an IC, as will be discussed later. In the digital signal processor 20, a flicker reducer 25 reduces the digital video signal on a per signal component basis using a method of the present invention as will be discussed

later. The digital video signal is finally converted into a luminance signal Y, and red and blue color difference signals R-Y and B-Y to be output from the digital signal processor 20.

5 A system controller 14, including a microcomputer, controls each block in the camera.

More specifically, a lens drive control signal is supplied from the system controller 14 to a lens driver 15 packaged in an IC, and the lens driver 15 drives lenses in
10 an image pickup optical system 11.

The system controller 14 supplies a timing control signal to a timing generator 16. The timing generator 16 supplies a variety of timing signals to a CMOS image pickup element 12 to drive the CMOS image pickup element 12.

15 The system controller 14 receives detection signals for signal components from the digital signal processor 20. The analog signal processor 13 gain controls the color signal in response to an AGC signal from the system controller 14. Signal processing of the digital signal processor 20 is
20 controlled by the system controller 14.

If a subject changes in a short period of time in response to an action of a photographer, the system controller 14 detects an output from a hand-shake sensor 17 connected to the system controller 14, and controls a
25 flicker reducer 25 as will be discussed later.

A control panel 18a and a display 18b, forming an interface 18, are connected to the system controller 14 via an interface (I/F) 19 composed of a microcomputer. The system controller 14 detects a setting operation and a
5 selection operation on the control panel 18a. The system controller 14 also displays a set status and a control statue of the camera on the display 18b.

If a subject changes greatly in a short period of time in response to a camera operation, such as a zoom operation,
10 the system controller 14 detects the camera operation, and controls the flicker reducer 25 as will be discussed later.

If no flicker reduction process is required, the system controller 14 detects that no flicker reduction is required and controls the flicker reducer 25 as will be discussed
15 later.

(Primary color system: Fig. 2)

Fig. 2 illustrates an example of the digital signal processor 20 of a primary color system.

The primary color system is a three-panel system or a
20 single panel system. The three-panel system includes the image pickup optical system 11 of Fig. 1 including a light separation system for separating light from a subject into the RGB primary colors, and a CMOS image pickup element as the CMOS image pickup element 12 for the RGB colors. The
25 single-panel system includes, as the CMOS image pickup

element 12, a CMOS image pickup element including RGB color
filers periodically arranged on each pixel in a horizontal
direction on the screen of a light input surface thereof.
In this case, the RGB primary color signals are read from
5 the CMOS image pickup element 12.

In the digital signal processor 20 of Fig. 1, a clamp
circuit 21 clamps a black level of each of the RGB primary
color signals to a predetermined level, a gain adjustment
circuit 22 gain adjusts the clamped RGB primary color
10 signals in accordance with an amount of exposure, and
flicker reducers 25R, 25G, and 25B reduce flicker components
in the gain adjusted RGB primary color signals in accordance
with a method of the present invention.

In the digital signal processor 20 of Fig. 2, a white
15 balance adjustment circuit 27 adjusts the flicker-reduced
RGB primary color signals, a gamma correction circuit 28
corrects the white-balanced adjusted RGB primary color
signals, and a synthesis matrix circuit 29 generates the
luminance signal Y, and the color difference signals R-Y and
20 B-Y from the gamma-corrected RGB primary color signals.

The primary color system generates the luminance signal
Y after the processing of the RGB primary color signals is
complete as shown in Fig. 2. Since the flicker component in
the RGB primary color signals is reduced in the course of
25 the process of the RGB primary color signals, the flicker

component in each of the color components and the luminance signal is sufficiently reduced.

Although flicker reducers 25R, 25G, and 25B are preferably arranged as shown in Fig. 2, the present
5 invention is not limited to this arrangement.

(Complementary color system: Fig. 3)

Fig. 3 illustrates one example of the digital signal processor 20 for a complementary color system.

The primary color system is a single-panel system that
10 includes, as the CMOS image pickup element 12 of Fig. 1, a CMOS image pickup element having complementary color filters on a light input surface thereof. The complementary color filter, as shown as a color filter 1 in Fig. 3, a green color filter section 1G and a magenta color filter section
15 1Mg are alternately arranged on the pixels in a horizontal direction at one horizontal line position Lo at every two lines, and a cyan color filter section 1Cy and a yellow color filter 1Ye are alternately arranged on the pixels in a horizontal direction at the other horizontal line position
20 Le at every two lines.

In this case, the CMOS image pickup element 12 synthesizes and reads video signals of two adjacent horizontal line positions. At each horizontal period, a color signal synthesized from the green color signal and the
25 cyan color signal and a color signal synthesized from the

magenta color signal and the yellow color signal are alternately obtained at every pixel clock from the CMOS image pickup element 12.

In the digital signal processor 20 of Fig. 3, a clamp
5 circuit 21 clamps a black level of the complementary color signal to a predetermined level, a gain adjustment circuit 22 gain adjusts the clamped complementary color signal in response to an amount of exposure, a luminance synthesizing circuit 23 generates a luminance signal Y from the gain-
10 adjusted complementary color signal, and a primary color separating circuit 24 separates the gain-adjusted complementary color signal into the RGB primary color signals.

In the digital signal processor 20 of Fig. 3, a flicker
15 reducer 25Y reduces a flicker component in the luminance signal Y from the luminance synthesizing circuit 23, and the flicker reducers 25R, 25G, and 25B reduce flicker components in the RGB primary color signals from the primary color separating circuit 24 in accordance with a method of the
20 present invention.

In the digital signal processor 20 of Fig. 3, a gamma correction circuit 26 corrects the gradation of the flicker-reduced luminance signal, thereby resulting in a luminance signal Y as an output, a white balance adjustment circuit 27
25 white-balance adjusts the flicker-reduced RGB primary color

signals, a gamma correction circuit 28 adjusts the gradation of the white-balance adjusted RGB primary color signals, and a synthesis matrix circuit 29 generates the color difference signals R-Y and B-Y from the gamma-corrected RGB primary
5 color signals.

In the primary color system, the luminance signal and the RGB primary color signals are generated in a relatively earlier phase of the process of the digital signal processor 20 as shown in Fig. 3. This is because the luminance signal
10 is easily generated from the synthesized signal through a simple additive process. If the RGB primary color signals are generated from the synthesized signal through a difference process, and the luminance signal Y is generated from the RGB primary color signals, and an S/N ratio of the
15 luminance signal is lowered.

If the luminance signal Y and the color signals are processed through separate lines, merely reducing the flicker component in each color signal is not sufficient in the reduction of the flicker component in the luminance
20 signal. The flicker components in each color component and the luminance signal are sufficiently reduced by separately reducing the flicker component in the luminance signal as shown in Fig. 3.

The flicker reducers 25R, 25G, and 25B are preferably
25 arranged as shown in Fig. 3, but the present invention is

not limited to this arrangement.

[Embodiments of the flicker reduction method: Fig. 4 - Fig. 27]

The flicker reducers 25R, 25G, and 25B of Fig. 2, and
5 the flicker reducers 25R, 25G, and 25B of Fig. 3 are
constructed as discussed below. The flicker reducers 25R,
25G, and 25B are hereinafter collectively referred to as a
flicker reducer 25.

In the following discussion, an input image signal
10 refers to a RGB primary color signal or a luminance signal
input to the flicker reducer 25 prior to a flicker reduction
process, and an output image signal refers to a RGB primary
color signal or a luminance signal, output from the flicker
reducer 25, subsequent to the flicker reduction process.

15 In the following discussion, a subject is photographed
by a CMOS camera of an NTSC system (with a vertical
synchronization frequency of 60 Hz) under an illumination of
a fluorescent lamp operating from a commercial AC power
source of 50 Hz. When the fluorescent light flicker is not
20 reduced, the brightness level variations and the color
variations take place not only between fields but also
within each field and a strip pattern of five periods (five
wavelengths) appears over three fields (three wavelengths)
on a screen as shown in Figs. 29 - 31.

25 In a non-inverter fluorescent lamp as well as an

inverter fluorescent lamp, flickering takes place if rectification is not sufficient. The present invention is thus not limited to the non-inverter type.

(First example of the flicker reduction method: Fig. 4)

5 Fig. 4 illustrates a first example of the flicker reducer 25.

As shown in Figs. 30 and 31, the subject is uniform. The flicker component is typically proportional to a signal intensity of the subject.

10 Let $In'(x,y)$ represent an input image signal (an RGB primary color signal or a luminance signal prior to the flicker reduction process) of a subject at any pixel $n(x,y)$ in any field n , and $In'(x,y)$ is a sum of a signal component free from the flicker component and the flicker component
15 proportional to the signal component as represented in equation (1) in Fig. 17A.

$In(x,y)$ represents the signal component, $\Gamma_n(y) * In(x,y)$ represents the flicker component, and $\Gamma_n(y)$ represents a flicker coefficient. One horizontal period is sufficiently
20 shorter than a light emission period (1/100 second) of a fluorescent lamp, and the flicker coefficient is considered as being constant on the same line in the same field, and the flicker coefficient is thus represented by $\Gamma_n(y)$.

As represented by equation (2) in Fig. 17A, $\Gamma_n(y)$ is
25 expressed by Fourier series for generalization. In this way,

the flicker coefficient is expressed in a form that accounts for all of emission characteristics and persistence characteristics, different from type to type of fluorescent lamp.

5 In equation (2), λ_0 represents the wavelength of the on-screen flicker shown in Fig. 30. Let M represent the number of read lines per field, and λ_0 is $L (=M*60/100)$ lines. Here, ω_0 represents a normalization angular frequency normalized by λ_0 .

10 Here, γ_m represents an amplitude of the flicker component of each order ($m=1, 2, 3, \dots$). Φ_{mn} represents an initial phase of the flicker component of each order, and is determined by the light emission period (1/100 second) and the exposure timing of the fluorescent lamp. Since Φ_{mn}
15 reverts back to the same value every three fields, and a difference of Φ_{mn} to the immediately preceding field is determined by equation (3) in Fig. 17A.

<Calculation and storage of integrated value>

 In the example of Fig. 4, an integrating block 31
20 integrates the input image signal $In'(x,y)$ over one line in a horizontal direction on the screen as shown in equation (4) of Fig. 17B to minimize the effect of a picture in the detection of a flicker. An integrated value $F_n(y)$ is thus calculated. As represented by equation (5) of Fig. 17B,
25 $\alpha_n(y)$ in equation (4) represents a value that is obtained by

integrating a signal component $I_n(x,y)$ over one line.

The integrated value $F_n(y)$ thus calculated is stored in an integrated value storage block 32 to detect flickering in subsequent fields. The integrated value storage block 32 is
5 designed to store the integrated values of at least two fields.

If a subject is uniform, the integrated value $\alpha_n(y)$ of the signal component $I_n(x,y)$ becomes constant. It is thus easy to extract a flicker component $\alpha_n(y) * \Gamma_n(y)$ from the
10 integrated value $F_n(y)$ of the input image signal $I_n'(x,y)$.

In a general subject, however, $\alpha_n(y)$ contains $m * \omega_0$ component, and it is impossible to separate a luminance signal and a color component, as a flicker component, from a luminance signal and a color component as a signal component
15 of the subject itself. It is impossible to extract only the flicker component. The flicker component in a second term is significantly smaller than the signal component in a first term in equation (4), and the flicker component is almost buried in the signal component.

20 Fig. 24 illustrates the integrated value $F_n(y)$ in three consecutive fields of a subject (a color subject in practice) of Fig. 23 for reference. Fig. 24 is a plot of the integrated value $F_n(y)$ of a red color, and Field: $N+0$ (solid line), Field: $N+1$ (dash line), and Field: $N+2$ (broken
25 line) represent first, second, and third fields appearing

consecutively. As seen from Fig. 24, it is impossible to extract the flicker component directly from the integrated value $F_n(y)$.

<Average value calculation and difference calculation>

5 As shown in Fig. 4, the integrated values of the three consecutive fields is used to remove the effect of $\alpha_n(y)$ from the integrated value $F_n(y)$.

In this example, during the calculation of the integrated value $F_n(y)$, an integrated value $F_{n-1}(y)$ on the
10 same line in the first preceding field immediately prior to the current field and an integrated value $F_{n-2}(y)$ on the same line in the second preceding field immediately prior to the first preceding field are read from the integrated value storage block 32. A average value calculating block 33
15 calculates an average value $AVE[F_n(y)]$ of the three integrated value $F_n(y)$, $F_{n-1}(y)$, and $F_{n-2}(y)$.

If the subject is identified as the same entity during the three consecutive fields, $\alpha_n(y)$ may be assumed to have the same value. If the motion of the subject is small
20 enough during the three consecutive fields, this assumption presents no problem in practice. In the calculation of the average of the integrated value during the three consecutive fields, equation (3) means that signals with the phases of the flicker components thereof successively shifted by $(-2\pi/3) \cdot m$ are summed. As a result, the flicker components
25

cancel out each other. The average value $AVE[F_n(y)]$ is expressed by equation (6) of Fig. 18A.

The average value of the integrated values for the three consecutive fields is calculated based on the
5 assumption that the approximation of equation (7) of Fig. 18A holds. If the motion of the subject is large, the approximation of equation (7) does not hold.

In the flicker reducer 25 intended to work with a subject moving in a large amount, the integrated value
10 storage block 32 stores the integrated values over at least three fields, and the average value of the integrated values of at least four fields including the integrated value $F_n(y)$ of the current field. In this way, the operation of low-pass filters functioning in time axis reduces the effect of
15 the moving subject.

However, the flicker is repeated every three fields. To cancel out the flicker component, the average value of the integrated values of j (an integer multiple of 3, equal to or greater than twice 3, namely, 6, 9, ...) fields needs
20 to be calculated. The integrated value storage block 32 is thus designed to store the integrated values of at least $(j-1)$ fields.

Fig. 4 illustrates a case in which the approximation of equation (7) of Fig. 18A holds. Furthermore in this example,
25 a difference calculating block 34 calculates a difference

between the integrated value $F_n(y)$ of the current field from the integrating block 31 and the integrated value $F_{n-1}(y)$ of the field immediately prior to the current field from the integrated value storage block 32. The difference value
5 $F_n(y) - F_{n-1}(y)$ represented by equation (8) of Fig. 18B is thus calculated. Equation (8) also holds on condition that the approximation of equation (7) holds.

Fig. 25 illustrates the difference value $F_n(y) - F_{n-1}(y)$ of the three consecutive fields of the subject of Fig. 23.
10 Since the effect of the subject is sufficiently removed from the difference value $F_n(y) - F_{n-1}(y)$, the state of the flicker component (flicker coefficient) more distinctly appears than in the integrated value $F_n(y)$ of Fig. 24.

<Normalization of difference value>

15 Furthermore in the example of Fig. 4, the normalizing block 35 normalizes the difference value $F_n(y) - F_{n-1}(y)$ from the difference calculating block 34 by dividing the difference value $F_n(y) - F_{n-1}(y)$ by the average value $AVE[F_n(y)]$ from the average value calculating block 33,
20 thereby outputting the normalized difference value $g_n(y)$.

The normalized difference value $g_n(y)$ is expanded as represented by equation (9) of Fig. 19A using equation (6) of Fig. 18A and equation (8) of Fig. 18B and the sum-to-product formula of trigonometry. The normalized difference
25 value $g_n(y)$ is also expressed by equation (10) of Fig. 19B

using the relationship of equation (3) of Fig. 17A. Here, $|A_m|$ and θ_m in equation (10) are respectively represented by equations (11a) and (11b).

Since the effect of the signal intensity of the subject
5 still persists in the difference value $F_n(y) - F_{n-1}(y)$, the levels of luminance variations and color variations due to the flickering are different from area to area. By normalizing the difference value $g_n(y)$ as described above, levels of the luminance variations and the color variations
10 due to the flickering are set to be consistent to the same level.

Fig. 26 illustrates the normalized difference value $g_n(y)$ of the three consecutive fields of the subject of Fig. 23.

15 <Estimation of the flicker component through spectrum extraction>

$|A_m|$ and θ_m respectively represented by equations (11a) and (11b) of Fig. 19B are an amplitude and an initial phase of the spectrum of each order of the normalized difference
20 value $g_n(y)$. The normalized difference value $g_n(y)$ is Fourier transformed to determine the amplitude $|A_m|$ and the initial phase θ_m of the spectrum of each order. Equations (12a) and (12b) of Fig. 20A show that an amplitude γ_m and an initial phase ϕ_{mn} of the flicker component of each order
25 represented by equation (2) of Fig. 17A are thus obtained.

In the example of Fig. 4, a DFT block 51 discrete Fourier transforms data of one wavelength (of L lines) of flickering of the normalized difference value $gn(y)$ from the normalizing block 35.

5 Let $DFT[gn(y)]$ represent a DFT operation, and $Gn(m)$ represent the DFT result of order m, and the DFT operation is expressed by equation (13) of Fig. 20B. Here, W in equation (13) is represented by equation (14). According to the definition of the DFT, the relationship between
10 equations (11a) and (11b) and equation (13) is represented by equations (15a) and (15b) of Fig. 20C.

 The amplitude γ_m and the initial phase Φ_{mn} of the flicker of each order are thus determined from equations (12a), (12b), (15a), and (15b) with reference to equations
15 (16a) and (16b) of Fig. 20D.

 The data length of the DFT operation is set to the one wavelength (of L lines) of the flicker because a discrete spectrum group of an integer multiple of ω_0 can be directly obtained.

20 The FFT (Fast Fourier Transform) is typically used as a Fourier transform for digital signal processing. However, the DFT is intentionally used in this embodiment of the present invention. The DFT is more convenient than the FFT because the data length of the Fourier transform is not a
25 power of 2. Alternatively, the FFT can also be used by

manipulating input data and output data.

The flicker component is sufficiently approximated under the illumination of an actual fluorescent lamp even if the order number is limited to m-th order. It is not
5 necessary to output all data in the DFT operation. In comparison with the FFT, the DFT suffers from any particular drawback in terms of operation efficiency in the application of this invention.

The DFT block 51 extracts the spectrum through the DFT
10 operation defined by equation (13), and then estimates the amplitude γ_m and the initial phase Φ_{mn} of the flicker component of each order through an operation represented by equations (16a) and (16b).

In the example of Fig. 4, a flicker generating block 53
15 calculates a flicker coefficient $\Gamma_n(y)$ represented by equation (2) of Fig. 17A from the estimated values γ_m and Φ_{mn} from the DFT block 51.

As previously discussed, the flicker component is sufficiently approximated under the illumination of the
20 light of the fluorescent lamp even if the order number is limited to the m-th order. In the calculation of the flicker coefficient $\Gamma_n(y)$ through equation (2), the order of total sum is set to a predetermined order, such as a second order, rather than infinity.

25 Fig. 27 illustrates the flicker coefficient $\Gamma_n(y)$ of

the three consecutive fields of the subject of Fig. 23.

In the preceding method, the difference value $F_n(y) - F_{n-1}(y)$ is calculated and then normalized by the average value $AVE[F_n(y)]$ in a black background portion and a low-
5 illuminance portion, where the flicker component is typically small and is entirely buried in the signal component in the integrated value $F_n(y)$. The flicker component is thus accurately detected.

The estimation of the flicker component from the
10 spectrum to an appropriate order means that the approximation is effected with the normalized difference value $g_n(y)$ incompletely reproduced. Even if a discontinuity takes place in the normalized difference value $g_n(y)$, as a result of an incomplete reproduction, depending
15 on the state of the subject, the flicker component of that portion is accurately estimated.

<Calculation for flicker reduction>

From equation (1) of Fig. 17A, the signal component $I_n(x,y)$ having no flicker component is expressed in equation
20 (17) of Fig. 20E.

In the example of Fig. 4, a calculating block 40 adds 1 to the flicker coefficient $\Gamma_n(y)$ from the flicker generating block 53, and the input image signal $I_n'(x,y)$ is divided by the resulting sum $[1 + \Gamma_n(y)]$.

25 The flicker component contained in the input image

signal $In'(x,y)$ is almost entirely removed in this way. The calculating block 40 results in a signal component $In(x,y)$ having no substantial flicker component as an output image signal (as the RGB primary color signal or the luminance
5 signal subsequent to flicker reduction).

If all above processes are not completed within the duration of time of one field due to constraints on calculation performance of the system, a function of storing the flicker coefficient $\Gamma_n(y)$ over the three fields is
10 provided in the calculating block 40 taking advantage of the repetition of the flickering every three fields. The stored flicker coefficient $\Gamma_n(y)$ is calculated for the input image signal $In'(x,y)$ subsequent to the three fields.

(Example accounting for saturation region: Fig. 5)

15 If the calculating block 40 of Fig. 4 performs the calculation represented by equation (17) with the level of the input image signal $In'(x,y)$ falling within a saturation region, the signal component (a color component or a luminance component) varies against the object of the
20 invention. For this reason, the calculating block 40 preferably has a structure of Fig. 5.

The calculating block 40 of Fig. 5 includes an adder circuit 41 for adding 1 to the flicker coefficient $\Gamma_n(y)$ from the flicker generating block 53, a divider circuit 42
25 for dividing the input image signal $In'(x,y)$ by the sum

[$1+\Gamma_n(y)$], a switch 43 on the input side, a switch 44 on the output side, and a saturation level determining circuit 45. The saturation level determining circuit 45 determines on a per pixel basis whether the level of the input image signal
5 $In'(x,y)$ is not lower than a threshold level of the saturation region.

If it is determined that the level of the input image signal $In'(x,y)$ is lower than the threshold level of the saturation region on each pixel, the saturation level
10 determining circuit 45 sets the switches 43 and 44 to the sides thereof to the divider circuit 42. As previously discussed, the result of the calculation of equation (17) is output from the calculating block 40 as an output image signal.

15 If it is determined that the level of the input image signal $In'(x,y)$ is not lower than the threshold level of the saturation region on the pixel, the saturation level determining circuit 45 sets the switches 43 and 44 to the sides thereof opposite from the divider circuit 42. The
20 input image signal $In'(x,y)$ is output as is as an output signal from the calculating block 40.

When the level of the input image signal $In'(x,y)$ falls within the saturation region, the signal component (the color component or the luminance component) is free from
25 variations, and a high-quality image signal results.

(Second example of the flicker reduction method: Fig.

6)

If the difference value $F_n(y) - F_{n-1}(y)$ is normalized by the average value $AVE[F_n(y)]$ as shown in Fig. 4, a finite calculation accuracy is effectively achieved. If calculation accuracy requirement is satisfied, the integrated value $F_n(y)$ can be directly normalized by the average value $AVE[F_n(y)]$.

Fig. 6 illustrates such an example. The normalizing block 35 performs a normalization operation by dividing the integrated value $F_n(y)$ from the integrating block 31 by the average value $AVE[F_n(y)]$ from the average value calculating block 33, thereby outputting the normalized difference value $g_n(y)$.

The normalized difference value $g_n(y)$ is represented by equation (18) of Fig. 21A. As represented by equation (19) of Fig. 21B, a subtracter circuit 36 subtracts 1 from the normalized difference value $g_n(y)$ represented by equation (18) and transfers the subtraction results to the DFT (discrete Fourier transform) block 51 to make the subsequent process of the arrangement of Fig. 6 identical to the subsequent process of the arrangement of Fig. 4.

Since $|A_m| = \gamma_m$ and $\theta_m = \Phi_{mn}$, γ_m and Φ_{mn} are determined from equations (20a) and (20b) with reference to equations (15a) and (15b) of Fig. 20C.

In the example of Fig. 4, the DFT block 51 estimates the amplitude γ_m and the initial phase Φ_{mn} of the flicker component of each order through the calculation of equations (16a) and (16b) after extracting the spectrum through the DFT operation defined by equation (13). In the example of Fig. 6, the DFT block 51 estimates the amplitude γ_m and the initial phase Φ_{mn} of the flicker component of each order through the calculation of equations (20a) and (20b) after extracting the spectrum through the DFT operation defined by equation (13). The subsequent process remains unchanged from that of the arrangement of Fig. 4.

Since the example of Fig. 6 does not need the difference calculating block 34, the flicker reducer 25 is simplified accordingly.

In this example as well, the calculating block 40 preferably has the structure of Fig. 5.

(Third example of the flicker reduction method: Fig. 7)

If the approximation defined by equation (7) of Fig. 18A holds, the average value $\text{AVE}[F_n(y)]$ for use in the normalization in the example of Fig. 4 equals $\alpha_n(y)$ defined by equation (6), and the second term $[\alpha_n(y) * F_n(y)]$ of equation (4) of Fig. 17B significantly smaller than the first term $\alpha_n(y)$ has an insignificant effect on the normalization.

The integrated value $F_n(y)$ is used instead of the

average value $AVE[F_n(y)]$ in the normalization without any particular problem. The flicker component is effectively detected in the same manner as when the average value $AVE[F_n(y)]$ is used.

5 In the example of Fig. 7, the normalizing block 35 performs a normalization operation by dividing the difference value $F_n(y) - F_{n-1}(y)$ from the difference calculating block 34 by the integrated value $F_n(y)$ from the integrating block 31. The subsequent process remains
10 unchanged from that of the arrangement of Fig. 4.

 In the example of Fig. 7, it is sufficient if the integrated value storage block 32 holds the integrated value of one field, and the average value calculating block 33 is not required. The flicker reducer 25 is thus simplified in
15 structure.

 In this example as well, the calculating block 40 preferably has the structure of Fig. 5.

 (Example of another process performed under non-fluorescent lamp: Fig. 8 and Fig. 9)

20 No particular problem is presented in the above-referenced flicker reduction process when a photographing operation is performed under the illumination of a non-fluorescent lamp (under an non-fluorescent illumination environment). However, if an otherwise unnecessary process
25 is performed, the effect on image quality becomes a concern.

even if the flicker component is low enough.

If a photographing operation is performed under the illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp, the flicker reduction process is preferably disabled. The flicker
5 reducer 25 is preferably designed to output the input image signal $In'(x,y)$ as is as an output image signal from the flicker reducer 25.

Fig. 8 illustrates an example of such a flicker reducer 25. A normalized and integrated value calculating block 30
10 is designed as shown in the example of Fig. 4, Fig. 6 or Fig. 7. In the example of Fig. 4 and Fig. 7, the difference value $F_n(y) - F_{n-1}(y)$ rather than the integrated value $F_n(y)$ is normalized, and for convenience of explanation, the corresponding block is also referred to as a normalized and
15 integrated value calculating block.

In the example of Fig. 8, a under-fluorescent-lamp determination block 52 is arranged between the DFT block 51 and the flicker generating block 53.

Under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp, the
20 level (amplitude) γ_m of the calculated component of each order is sufficiently higher at $m=1$ than a threshold Th and sharply lowers as m increases as shown in Fig. 22A. Under the illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp, the level of the component is lower than the threshold Th at every order
25 as shown in Fig. 22B.

The spectrum is ideally zero under the illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp. In practice, however, the subject moves, and the normalized difference value $gn(y)$ or the normalized integrated value $gn(y)-1$, generated from the signals of a plurality of consecutive fields, inevitably contains a tiny amount of frequency component.

The under-fluorescent-lamp determination block 52 thus determines whether the level at $m=1$ is above the threshold Th . If it is determined that the level at $m=1$ is above the threshold Th , the under-fluorescent-lamp determination block 52 determines that the photographing operation is performed under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp. The estimated values of γ_m and Φ_{mn} from the DFT block 51 are directly output to the flicker generating block 53. In this case, the above-described flicker reduction process is executed.

If the level of the component at $m=1$ is lower than the threshold Th , the under-fluorescent-lamp determination block 52 determines that the photographing operation is performed under the non-fluorescent lamp, and sets the estimated value of γ_m of all order m to be zero. The flicker coefficient $\Gamma_n(y)$ becomes zero, and the input image signal $In'(x,y)$ is output as is as an output image signal from the calculating block 40.

Fig. 9 illustrates such an example. In this example,

as in the example of Fig. 8, the under-fluorescent-lamp determination block 52 determines whether the photographing operation is performed under the under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp. If it is determined that the

5 photographing operation is performed under the illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp, the under-fluorescent-lamp determination block 52 sets a detection flag COMP_OFF, stops the process of the flicker generating block 53 and the calculating block 40, and outputs the input image signal
10 $In'(x,y)$ as is as an output image signal from the calculating block 40. If it is determined that the photographing operation is performed under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp, the under-fluorescent-lamp determination block 52 resets the detection flag COMP_OFF
15 and the flicker reduction operation is thus performed.

If the photographing operation is performed under the illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp in the example of Fig. 9, not only an adverse effect on image quality is prevented but also power consumption is reduced.

20 (Subject greatly changing in response to an operation or an action of a photographer: Fig. 10)

A subject occasionally changes in a short period of time in response to zooming, panning, tilting, or hand-shaking of a photographer. In such a case, the assumption
25 of equation (7) of Fig. 18A fails to hold. As a result, the

flicker detection accuracy is degraded.

The image pickup device is constructed as shown in Fig. 10 taking into consideration a subject that changes greatly in a short period of time in response to an operation or an action of a photographer.

As shown in Fig. 10, switches 55 and 56 and a flicker storage block 57 are arranged between the flicker generating block 53 and the calculating block 40 additionally to the flicker reducer 25 of Fig. 4, Fig. 6, or Fig. 7. The detection flag DET_OFF, to be discussed later, output from the system controller 14 is fed to the switches 55 and 56 as a switching signal.

The flicker storage block 57 stores the flicker coefficient $\Gamma_n(y)$ of the three fields. Each time the process of one field is complete, the flicker coefficient $\Gamma_n(y)$ is stored for use in the next field. The output read from the flicker storage block 57 is switched every three fields.

The system controller 14 detects a subject if the subject changes greatly in a short period of time in response to the operation or the action of the photographer.

For example, if the photographer presses a zoom key on the control panel 18a, the system controller 14 detects the pressing via the interface 19. The system controller 14 controls lenses in response to the photographer's zoom

operation such as a telephoto and a wide-angle operation. The hand-shaking of the photographer is detected by the hand-shake sensor 17, and the information of the hand-shaking is sent to the system controller 14. In response to
5 the hand-shake information, the system controller 14 performs anti-shake control. Upon detecting panning or tilting, the system controller 14 lightens the degree of anti-shake correction during panning, for example. Such control techniques remain unchanged from those that are
10 performed in ordinary cameras.

In the example of Fig. 10, the system controller 14 sets the detection flag DET_OFF if the operation or the action of the photographer causing the subject to be changed greatly in a short period of time is detected. The system
15 controller 14 resets the detection flag DET_OFF if neither of such operation and action is performed.

In a normal state under which the subject does not change greatly in a short period of time, the detection flag DET_OFF is reset. In the flicker reducer 25, the switch 55
20 is set to the side thereof to the flicker generating block 53. The flicker coefficient $\Gamma_n(y)$ is fed from the flicker generating block 53 to the calculating block 40. The flicker reduction operation is performed. With the switch 56 turned on, the flicker coefficient $\Gamma_n(y)$ is stored in the
25 flicker storage block 57.

The detection flag DET_OFF is set if the subject changes greatly in a short period of time in response to the operation or the action of the photographer. In the flicker reducer 25, the switch 55 is set to the side thereof to the flicker storage block 57. The calculating block 40 receives the flicker coefficient $\Gamma_n(y)$ at a high detection precision level immediately prior to the operation or the action of the photographer, read from the flicker storage block 57, instead of the flicker coefficient $\Gamma_n(y)$ at a low detection precision level. The flicker reduction operation is performed. The switch 56 is turned off, and thus prevents the flicker coefficient $\Gamma_n(y)$ at the low detection precision level from being stored onto the flicker storage block 57.

The flicker detection accuracy is heightened even when the subject changes greatly in a short period of time in response to the operation or the action of the photographer. The flicker is reliably and sufficiently reduced.

Furthermore, the detection flag DET_OFF is supplied to the normalized and integrated value calculating block 30, the DFT block 51, and the flicker generating block 53. If the subject changes greatly in a short period of time in response to the operation or the action of the photographer, the detection flag DET_OFF is set. The set detection flag DET_OFF stops the process of each of the normalized and integrated value calculating block 30, the DFT block 51, and

the flicker generating block 53. In this case, power consumption is also reduced.

In this case, the flicker coefficient $\Gamma_n(y)$ is replaced with the immediately prior flicker coefficient thereof. A
5 more front stage signal, for example, an integrated value $\Gamma_n(y)$, may be replaced with the immediately prior signal thereof.

(Example of another process performed depending on photographing condition: Fig. 11 and Fig. 12)

10 As will be discussed later, the flicker reduction operation becomes unnecessary depending on the photographing condition. In view of the effect on image quality, performing otherwise unnecessary flicker reduction operation is undesirable when the photographing operation is performed
15 under the illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp as described above.

First, the photographing conditions that require no flicker reduction operation include the case in which a video camera or a digital still camera, each capable of
20 taking both a moving image and a still image, photographs a still image.

A camera employing an XY addressing type image pickup element such as a CMOS image pickup element can set exposure timings of all pixels in one frame (including exposure start
25 timings and exposure end timings) to be uniform, and can

control the effect of the fluorescent light flicker. A reading operation from the image pickup element is free from the limitation of frame rate that is applied to moving image capturing, and is thus performed at a slow speed in a light
5 blocked state with a mechanical shutter closed.

Based on a camera operation on the control panel 18a in the embodiment of Fig. 1, the system controller 14 determines whether to take a still image with the exposure of all pixels in one frame set to the same timing.

10 Second, the photographing states that need no flicker reduction operation also include the case in which a photographing operation is performed outdoors under the light of the sun, and the case in which the exposure time (electronic shutter time) is set to be an integer multiple
15 of periods (1/100 second) of luminance changes of the fluorescent light by adjusting the amount of exposure.

Whether the photographing operation is performed under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp is determined by referencing the level of the spectrum extracted by the DFT
20 block 51 as previously discussed with reference to Figs. 8 and 9. The photographing operation performed outdoors under the light of the sun is categorized as a photographing operation under the illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp, and in this case, the system controller 14 directly
25 determines from the amount of light of a subject that a

photographing operation is performed under the illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp.

As previously discussed, the camera employing the XY addressing type image pickup element such as a CMOS image pickup element is free from the fluorescent light flicker if the exposure time is set to be an integer multiple of the periods (1/100 second) of the luminance changes of the fluorescent lamp. The system controller 14 directly detects whether the exposure time is set to be an integer multiple of periods of the luminance change of the fluorescent lamp by adjusting the exposure amount.

If the system controller 14 determines that the photographing state requires no flicker reduction operation, the flicker reduction operation is not effected. The system is designed so that the input image signal $In'(x,y)$ is output as is as an output image signal from the flicker reducer 25.

Fig. 11 illustrates one example of such a system configuration. In this example of the flicker reducer 25, a nulling block 59 is arranged between the DFT block 51 and the flicker generating block 53. The nulling block 59 is controlled by a flicker reduction on/off control signal from the system controller 14.

If the system controller 14 determines that the flicker reduction operation is required, the flicker reduction

on/off control signal is set to an on state, and the nulling block 59 outputs the estimated values of γ_m and Φ_{mn} from the DFT block 51, as are, to the flicker generating block 53. In this case, the flicker reduction operation is effected.

5 If the system controller 14 determines that the flicker reduction operation is unnecessary, the flicker reduction on/off control signal is set to an off state. The nulling block 59 nulls the estimated value of γ_m of the order m to zero. In this case, the flicker coefficient $\Gamma_n(y)$ also
10 becomes zero, and the input image signal $I_n'(x,y)$ is output as is as an output image signal from the calculating block 40.

Fig. 12 illustrates still another example. The calculating block 40 in the flicker reducer 25 includes the
15 adder circuit 41, the divider circuit 42 and the switches 43 and 44, all shown in Fig. 5, but does not include the saturation level determining circuit 45 of Fig. 5. The switches 43 and 44 are controlled for switching by the flicker reduction on/off control signal from the system
20 controller 14.

If the system controller 14 determines that the flicker reduction operation is necessary, the switches 43 and 44 are set to the side thereof to the divider circuit 42. As previously discussed, the calculation result of equation
25 (17) is output as an output image signal from the

calculating block 40.

If the system controller 14 determines that no flicker reduction operation is necessary, the switches 43 and 44 are set to the sides thereof opposite from the divider circuit
5 42, and the input image signal $In'(x,y)$ is output as is as an output image signal from the calculating block 40.

In the example of Fig. 12, the flicker reduction on/off control signal is fed to the normalized and integrated value calculating block 30, the DFT block 51, and the flicker
10 generating block 53. If the system controller 14 determines that no flicker reduction operation is necessary, the process of each of the normalized and integrated value calculating block 30, the DFT block 51 and the flicker
generating block 53 is stopped. Power consumption is thus
15 reduced in this example.

(Adjustment of detected flicker component: Fig. 13 - Fig. 15)

In accordance with each of the above-referenced methods, the flicker component in the input image signal is reliably
20 and effectively reduced when the fluorescent light flicker is steadily and regularly generated.

However, in each of the above-referenced methods, the average calculation or the difference calculation is performed throughout a plurality of fields to detect the
25 flicker component. For this reason, the flicker component

cannot be accurately detected in a transitional and unstable state, for example, at the moment the fluorescent lamp is switched on or off or at the moment of any person's entrance into or exit out of the room illuminated by a fluorescent
5 lamp. If the flicker reduction operation is effected in accordance with the flicker component obtained in such a transitional and unstable state, an undesirable correction can be performed on the input image signal.

A variation in an angle of field in a horizontal
10 direction can be caused in response to a horizontal motion of a subject, a camera operation such as panning and zooming, and hand shaking of a photographer. Such variations are reliably and stably reduced. However, flicker reduction performance is slightly lowered for a variation in the angle
15 of view in a vertical direction caused in response to a vertical motion of the subject, the camera operation such as panning and zooming, and hand shaking of the photographer.

This problem is eliminated by the method illustrated in Fig. 10. In accordance with this method, however, the
20 flicker component $I_n(y)$ is switched between when the subject is stable free from a large variation in a short period of time and when the subject changes greatly in a short period of time in response to an operation or an action of the photographer. For this reason, the photographer may feel
25 the image of the subject discordant.

The effect of external disturbance cannot be controlled even in a normal stable state. In the method of Fig. 10, the image pickup device responds directly to the external disturbance because of the fast tracking feature thereof, and suffers from an error in the flicker reduction against the object of the flicker reduction operation.

To reduce the effect of external disturbance, a filtering operation using an LPF (low-pass filter) is performed in the course of estimating the flicker component, and a time constant thereof is prolonged to slow the tracking feature in the flicker estimation.

However, the setting of slow tracking feature also results in a slow tracking feature in the above-referenced transitional state. The flicker reduction operation cannot be performed quickly although the flicker reduction operation is required, for example, at the moment the fluorescent lamp is switched on or at the moment of any person's entrance into the room illuminated by the fluorescent lamp. Conversely, the flicker reduction operation is continuously performed although the flicker reduction operation is required no longer, for example, at the moment the fluorescent lamp is switched off or at the moment of any person's exit out of the room illuminated by the fluorescent lamp.

Instead of performing the calculation operation on the

detected flicker component and the input image signal, the amplitude and the phase of the detected flicker component are adjusted as necessary, and then the adjusted flicker component and the input image signal are subjected to the calculation operation. In this way, the flicker reduction operation is flexibly and properly performed in a variety of cases.

In the following example, parameters related to the flicker reduction operation, for example, the amplitude and the phase of the estimated flicker component are adjusted.

Fig. 13 illustrates a basic structure of such an arrangement. In this example, the system controller 14 captures data of the amplitude γ_m and the initial phase Φ_{mn} of the estimated flicker component from the DFT block 51 in the flicker reducer 25. A parameter controller 14a in the system controller 14 adjusts the data as described later, and inputs the adjusted data of the amplitude γ_m' and initial phase Φ_{mn}' to the flicker generating block 53 in the flicker reducer 25.

The flicker generating block 53 calculates the flicker coefficient $\Gamma_n(y)$, represented by equation (2) of Fig. 17A, from the adjusted data of the amplitude γ_m' and initial phase Φ_{mn}' instead of the amplitude γ_m and initial phase Φ_{mn} obtained from the DFT block 51. In this example, γ_m and Φ_{mn} are replaced with γ_m' and Φ_{mn}' in equation (2) of Fig. 17A.

As shown in Fig. 13, the normalized and integrated value calculating block 30 in the flicker reducer 25 has the same structure as the counterpart in Fig. 4. Alternatively, the normalized and integrated value calculating block 30 may have the same structure as the counterpart shown in Fig. 6 or Fig. 7.

<First specific example: Fig. 14>

Fig. 14 illustrates a first specific example of the system controller 14.

10 The number of lines for data of the amplitude γ_m and the initial phase Φ_{mn} from the DFT block 51 are m per field in practice, but a single line only is shown. The same is true of the output data of the amplitude γ_m' and the initial phase Φ_{mn}' from the parameter controller 14a.

15 The data of the amplitude γ_m and the initial phase Φ_{mn} from the DFT block 51 are fed to digital LPFs (low-pass filters) 61 and 62, the output data of the digital LPF 61 is fed to a gain adjusting circuit (multiplier circuit) 63, and the output data of the gain adjusting circuit 63 is input to
20 the flicker generating block 53 as adjusted amplitude γ_m' . The output data of the digital LPF 62 is input to the flicker generating block 53 as adjusted initial phase Φ_{mn}' .

 A time constant T_a of the digital LPF 61 and a time constant T_p of the digital LPF 62 are set by the time
25 constant setting block 65. A gain (multiplication

coefficient) K_a of the gain adjusting circuit 63 is set by a gain setting block 66.

Preferably, the time constants of the digital LPFs 61 and 62 are continuously set to any value within a constant range. If a desired time constant cannot be set, a time constant close to the desired one may be set. If a single LPF cannot continuously change the time constant, a plurality of LPFs having separate time constants may be internally arranged, and by providing time constants T_a and T_p as a control code to the LPFs, a single LPF may be selected from the plurality of LPFs.

The initial phase Φ_{mn} periodically varies during the generation of flickering. For example, if the frequency of the commercial AC power source is 50 Hz and the vertical synchronization frequency of the camera is 60 Hz, the initial phase Φ_{mn} becomes the same value every three fields, and a difference of the initial phase Φ_{mn} takes place from the immediately prior field as represented by equation (3) of Fig. 17A.

The digital LPF 62 must serve as one LPF for the data of the same phase taking into consideration the variation in the initial phase Φ_{mn} . More specifically, if the variation period of the initial phase Φ_{mn} is three fields as described above, three LPFs are arranged as the digital LPF 62, and the data of the initial phase Φ_{mn} is distributed among the

three LPFs.

A state detecting block 68 receives the data of the amplitude γ_m and the initial phase Φ_{mn} , and AE (automatic exposure) control information and AWB (automatic white balance) control information, obtained in the system controller 14. More specifically, the AE control information is on-screen brightness information, and the AWB control information is color temperature information and information as to whether the camera is illuminated under a fluorescent lamp.

In response to these inputs, the state detecting block 68 detects the photographing conditions affecting the generation of the fluorescent light flicker. More specifically, the state detecting block 68 determines whether a current photographing condition is under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp, or a transitional state from the illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp to the illumination of the fluorescent lamp when the fluorescent lamp is turned on or a transitional state from the illumination of the fluorescent lamp to the illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp when the fluorescent lamp is turned off. In response to the determination results, a control mode is determined.

A control mode indicating signal is fed to the time constant setting block 65 and the gain setting block 66 to

indicate the determined control mode thereto. In response, the time constant setting block 65 sets the time constants T_a and T_p in the digital LPFs 61 and 62, respectively, and the gain setting block 66 sets the gain K_a in the gain
5 adjusting circuit 63.

Fig. 16 lists determination criteria for the state detection of the state detecting block 68. If the flickering occurs steadily and regularly under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp, the amplitude γ_m of
10 the estimated flicker component becomes generally constant, and the initial phase Φ_{mn} takes substantially the same value every constant period (every three fields at a commercial power source frequency of 50 Hz and a camera vertical synchronization frequency of 60 Hz).

15 These inputs are sufficient to cause the state detecting block 68 to determine that the flicker is generated steadily and regularly under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp.

Since the on-screen brightness varies generally
20 periodically under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp, the brightness information for the AE control is sufficient to cause the state detecting block 68 to determine that the camera is under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp.

In the AWE control, a light source is estimated from
25 detected color information, and a determination of whether

the light source is a fluorescent lamp is determined based on the estimated light source. A determination of whether the camera is under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp can be performed based on the light source estimating
5 information for the AWB control.

The above-referenced information over a plurality of past fields is generally checked to enhance detection accuracy.

Upon determining that the flickering takes place
10 steadily and regularly under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp, the state detecting block 68 sets, as the control mode, a mode A to be discussed later.

If no flickering takes place regularly under the illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp, the amplitude y_m
15 of the estimated flicker component contains only a noise component, and varies randomly in the vicinity of zero, and the initial phase Φ_{mn} randomly varies because of the noise.

Such information is sufficient for the state detecting block 68 to determine that no flicker reduction operation is
20 necessary under the illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp.

From the brightness information for the AE control indicating that variations in the screen brightness have no periodicity under the illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp, the state detecting block 68 determines that the
25 camera is under the illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp.

From the light source estimating information for the AWB control, the state detecting block 68 determines that the camera is under the illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp.

In this example, the above-referenced information over
5 a plurality of past fields is generally checked to enhance detection accuracy.

Upon determining that no flickering takes place steadily and regularly under the illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp (that no flicker reduction operation is
10 necessary), the state detecting block 68 sets, as the control mode, a mode B to be discussed later.

In response to the control mode determined by the state detecting block 68, the time constant setting block 65 sets the time constants T_a and T_p of the digital LPFs 61 and 62,
15 and the gain setting block 66 sets the gain K_a of the gain adjusting circuit 63. Actual values to be set are determined as described below in response to the system configuration and requirements to the system.

The time constant T_a of the digital LPF 61 is discussed
20 first. As previously discussed, the amplitude γ_m of the estimated flicker component slightly varies in the vicinity of zero and is generally constant in both the mode A (in which the flickering takes place steadily and regularly under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp) and the mode
25 B (in which no flickering takes place regularly under the

illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp). If external disturbance is applied, the amplitude γ_m is not constant.

To make the system robust to the external disturbance, the time constant T_a of the digital LPF 61 is preferably set to be longer. However, if the control mode is transitioned from the mode A to the mode B or from the mode B to the mode A, the time constant T_a of the digital LPF 61 is preferably set to be shorter to achieve a fast tracking feature during transitions.

10 More specifically, the amplitude γ_m must satisfy two mutually contradictory requirements at the same time. The method of Fig. 4, Fig. 6, or Fig. 7 provides an algorithm originally robust to the external disturbance.

In practice, a shorter time constant T_a is set with a view to the tracking feature. Most preferably, dynamic control may be introduced to provide a longer time constant T_a in either the mode A or the mode B and a shorter time constant T_a in a transition from the mode A to the mode B or in a transition from the mode B to the mode A.

20 The time constant T_p of the digital LPF 62 is discussed now. During the mode A (when the flickering takes place steadily and regularly under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp), the initial phase Φ_{mn} becomes substantially the same value every constant period based on the principle of the flicker generation as shown in Fig. 16.

25

A sufficiently longer time constant T_p needs to be set to be robust to the external disturbance.

In contrast, the initial phase Φ_{mn} takes a random number during the mode B (when no flickering takes place regularly under the illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp), and no particular advantage is provided by the setting of a longer time constant T_p . More specifically, during the mode B, the time constant T_p may be set to any value taking into consideration the effect of a gain adjustment to be discussed later.

The time constant T_a and the time constant T_p may be alternated between the mode A and the mode B.

The gain K_a of the gain adjusting circuit 63 is now discussed. During the mode A (when the flickering takes place steadily and regularly under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp), the amplitude γ_m is substantially constant as shown in Fig. 16, and the gain K_a can be set to 1.

The gain K_a determines a correction rate of the amplitude γ_m (if a gain $K_a=1$ is set, 100% of the input is output with a correction rate at zero), and the correction rate of the amplitude γ_m is directly controlled by varying the gain K_a .

Under actual photographic environments, the amplitude may be intentionally enlarged or intentionally decreased.

For this reason, the gain K_a is not limited to 1, and the system may be designed to set the gain K_a to be larger than 1 or smaller than 1.

During the mode B (in the state that no flicker is
5 generated steadily under the illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp), the amplitude γ_m takes a random value in the vicinity of zero in response to noise. Since no flicker reduction operation is required by nature during the mode B, the gain K_a is set to zero to disable the unnecessary
10 process.

The mode A and the mode B as the steady state (the state that the flicker is steadily generated or the state that no flicker is steadily generated) have been discussed. If the mode detected by the state detecting block 68 is
15 transitioned from the mode A to the mode B, it is likely that the photographic environment has changed from under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp to under the illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp. If the mode detected by the state detecting block 68 is transitioned
20 from the mode B to the mode A, it is likely that the photographic environment has changed from under the illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp to under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp.

As previously discussed with reference to Fig. 4, Fig.
25 6, or Fig. 7, in accordance with the basic method of the

present invention, the flicker component is extracted through the averaging operation or the difference operation throughout a plurality of fields. During the transition, one portion of a signal string for use in the averaging
5 operation or the difference operation contains a flicker component and another portion of the signal string has no flicker component.

As a result, an error takes place in the flicker component obtained through the averaging operation or the
10 difference operation, and an error also takes place in the detected amplitude γ_m and initial phase Φ_{mn} . If the flicker coefficient $\Gamma_n(y)$ is calculated from the error-affected amplitude γ_m and initial phase Φ_{mn} , the output image signal is also adversely affected.

15 To alleviate this problem, the gain setting block 66 detects a transitional state and controls the gain K_a in response to the transitional state.

More specifically, if the control mode is shifted from the mode A to the mode B, the reliability of each of the
20 amplitude γ_m and the initial phase Φ_{mn} has dropped at the start of the transition. Immediately subsequent to the transition, the gain K_a is switched from 1 to zero, and the flicker reduction operation of the flicker generating block 53 and the calculating block 40 is stopped. Alternatively,
25 the gain K_a is gradually lowered, and the flicker reduction

operation of the flicker generating block 53 and the calculating block 40 is smoothly stopped.

Conversely, if the control mode is transitioned from the mode B to the mode A, the reliability of each of the amplitude γ_m and the initial phase Φ_{mn} is still low at the start of the transition. After time elapse until the reliability of each of the amplitude γ_m and the initial phase Φ_{mn} rises to a sufficiently high level, the flicker generating block 53 and the calculating block 40 performs the flicker reduction operation. Alternatively, the gain K_a is gradually raised so that the flicker generating block 53 and the calculating block 40 smoothly perform the flicker reduction operation.

<Second specific example: Fig. 15>

Fig. 15 illustrates a second specific example of the system controller 14.

In this example, memories 71-74, switches 75-78, and a state detecting block 69 are added to the example of Fig. 14.

The memory 71 stores the data of the amplitude γ_m , the memory 72 stores the data of the initial phase Φ_{mn} , the memory 73 stores the output data of the gain adjusting circuit 63, and the memory 74 stores the output data of the digital LPF 62. The switches 75-78 select the input data and the output data of the memories 71-74, respectively, in response to the detection results of the state detecting

block 69. The output data of the switch 75 is fed to the digital LPF 61, the output data of the switch 76 is fed to the digital LPF 62, the output data of the switch 77 is fed to the flicker generating block 53 as the data of the
5 amplitude γ_m' , and the output data of the switch 78 is fed to the flicker generating block 53 as the data of the initial phase Φ_{mn}' .

The state detecting block 69 receives zooming information and hand-shake information. In response to the
10 zooming information, the state detecting block 69 determines whether a large variation in the angle of view takes place in response to a zooming action, and in response to the hand-shake information, the state detecting block 69 determines whether a large variation in the angle of view
15 takes place in response to panning and tilting actions and a large-amplitude hand shake.

If it is determined that no large variations take place in the angle of view, the state detecting block 69 sets the switches 75-78 to the sides thereof opposite from the sides
20 of the memories 71-74. Normally, the flicker reduction operation is performed as in the example of Fig. 14.

If it is determined that a large variation takes place in the angle of view, the state detecting block 69 sets the switches 75-78 to the sides thereof to the memories 71-74.

25 Since the reliability of each of the amplitude γ_m and

the initial phase Φ_{mn} drops when a large variation occurs in the angle of view, amplitude data and initial phase data acquired in the past and respectively stored in the memory 73 and the memory 74 are input to the flicker generating block 53 as the amplitude γ_m' and the initial phase Φ_{mn}' .

Since the amplitude γ_m and the initial phase Φ_{mn} are steady during the mode A (in the state that the flickering is generated steadily and regularly under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp) as shown in Fig. 16, the use of the past data presents no problem at all. On the contrary, the past data should be positively used.

However, if low-reliability data is successively input to the digital LPFs 61 and 62 in the middle of variation in the angle of view, the amplitude γ_m' and the initial phase Φ_{mn}' obtained immediately subsequent to the setting of the switches 77 and 78 to the sides thereof opposite from the memories 73 and 74 suffer from error.

To eliminate such a problem, during the occurrence of a large variation in the angle of view, the state detecting block 69 not only sets the switches 77 and 78 to the sides thereof to the memories 73 and 74, respectively, but also sets the switches 75 and 76 to the sides thereof to the memories 71 and 72, respectively. With this arrangement, the low-reliability data are not input to the digital LPFs 61 and 62, and high-reliability data obtained prior to the

occurrence of the large variation in the angle of view and stored in the memories 71 and 72 are input to the digital LPFs 61 and 62.

Regardless of the zooming information and the hand-
5 shake information, the reliabilities of the amplitude γ_m and the initial phase Φ_{mn} are separately determined.

Reliability level information as a result of determination is input to the state detecting block 69. If the reliability level information indicates that the reliability
10 of the amplitude γ_m and the initial phase Φ_{mn} is low, the switches 75-78 are set to the sides thereof to the memories 71-74. In this way, past data having a high reliability is used.

<Advantages>

15 In accordance with the above-referenced embodiments, the flicker reduction operation is less sensitive to the external disturbance under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp and under the illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp, and still provides fast response and
20 tracking features during the transitional state. The image pickup device performs the proper flicker reduction operation smoothly without discordance at the moment of the state transition, at the occurrence of the variation in the angle of view, or when the flicker detection parameter is
25 low in reliability.

[Alternate embodiments]

(Integration)

In each of the above-referenced examples, the input image signal $In'(x,y)$ is integrated throughout one line.

5 Since the input image signal $In'(x,y)$ is integrated to obtain a sample value of the flicker component with the effect of a pattern of the image reduced, the integration may be performed throughout a plurality of lines rather than only one line. One period of the fluorescent light flicker
10 (on-screen flicker) appearing as a striped pattern on the screen corresponds to $L (=M*60/100)$ lines as previously described. If at least two sample values are obtained in one period, i.e., L lines, the flicker component is detected based on the sampling theorem.

15 In practice, a plurality of sample values, for example, at least 10 sample values are preferably obtained from one period, i.e., L lines of the on-screen flicker. Even in this case, the horizontal period of the input image signal $In'(x,y)$ is integrated over a duration of time equal to or
20 more than several times the horizontal periods, more particularly, ten times longer than the horizontal period. The integration time is not limited to an integer multiple of horizontal periods, and for example, 2.5 times the horizontal period is perfectly acceptable.

25 If the integration time is prolonged and a sample count

per unit time is reduced, workload involved in the DFT operation by the DFT block 51 is lightened. When a subject moves in a vertical direction of the screen, the effect of the motion is reduced.

5 (Other alternate embodiments)

In the primary color system of Fig. 2, the flicker components in the RGB primary color signals is detected and reduced by the flicker reducers 25R, 25G, and 25B on a per color signal basis. Alternatively, the previously described
10 flicker reducer 25 is arranged on the output side of the luminance signal Y of the synthesis matrix circuit 29 in order to detect and reduce the flicker component in the luminance signal Y.

In accordance with the above-referenced embodiments,
15 the digital signal processor 20 including the flicker reducer 25 is implemented by hardware. Part or whole of the flicker reducer 25 or the digital signal processor 20 may be implemented by software.

In accordance with the above-referenced embodiments,
20 the vertical synchronization frequency is 60 Hz (with one field period equal to 1/60 second). The present invention is applicable to a progressive type camera having a vertical synchronization frequency of 30 Hz (with one frame period being 1/30 second). In this case, three frame period (1/10
25 second) is an integer multiple (the stripe pattern of the

flicker is 10 wavelengths over three frames) of the emission period of (1/100 second) of a fluorescent lamp, and the field of the above-referenced embodiment may be substituted for the frame.

- 5 The present invention is applicable to an XY addressing type image pickup element such as an image pickup element other than a CMOS image pickup element.

Industrial Applicability

- 10 In accordance with the present invention, the flicker unique to the fluorescent lamp appearing in the XY addressing type image pickup element such as a CMOS image pickup element is detected and reduced reliably and sufficiently through the simple signal processing without
15 using a photosensitive element regardless of the subject, the video signal level, and the type of the fluorescent lamp.

- In particular, when the flicker reduction operation of the present invention is used for the RGB primary color signals, not only the light and dark flicker but also the
20 color flicker is accurately detected, and reliably and sufficiently reduced.

- If the level of the signal falls within the saturation region, the flicker reduction is disabled. In this way, the signal component is prevented from being affected by the
25 flicker reduction operation.

The flicker reduction operation is disabled under the illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp. In this way, the effect of the flicker reduction operation on the image quality is controlled.

5 If the subject changes greatly in a short period of time in response to the operation or the action of the photographer, the immediately precedingly estimated flicker component or the flicker component estimated from the immediately preceding signal is calculated. In this
10 arrangement, flicker detection accuracy is free from degradation due a large change in the subject happening in a short period of time.

The flicker reduction operation is disabled in the photographing condition that does not need the flicker
15 reduction operation, for example, in the still image taking. In this way, the effect of the flicker reduction operation on the image quality is controlled.

The estimated flicker component is adjusted, and the adjusted flicker component and the input image signal are
20 calculated. With this arrangement, the signal component is robust to the effect of external disturbance under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp and under the illumination of the non-fluorescent lamp. The image pickup device achieves excellent response and tracking features at
25 the transition. Furthermore, the image pickup device

performs the processes smoothly without discordance at the state transitions, at the variation in the angle of view, or when the reliability of the flicker detection parameters is low.

CLAIMS

1. A flicker reduction method for reducing a fluorescent light flicker component in a color signal or a luminance signal obtained by photographing a subject through an XY addressing type image pickup element under an illumination of a fluorescent lamp, comprising:

a step of inputting color signal or luminance signal, a step of integrating the color signal or the luminance signal, as an input image signal, with respect to each horizontal line of each color signal or said luminance signal throughout a duration of time equal to or longer than one horizontal period,

a step of normalizing the integrated value or a difference value between the integrated values of adjacent fields or adjacent frames with respect to each color signal,

a step of extracting a spectrum of the normalized integrated value or the normalized difference value with respect to each color signal,

a step of estimating a flicker component from the extracted spectrum with respect to each color signal, and

a step of performing a calculation operation on the estimated flicker component and the input image signal to cancel out the estimated flicker component with respect to each color signal.

2. A flicker reduction method for reducing a fluorescent light flicker component in each of color signals of colors obtained by photographing a subject through an XY addressing type image pickup element under an illumination of a fluorescent lamp, comprising:

a step of inputting color signals of colors,

a step of integrating the color signal of each color, as an input image signal, with respect to each horizontal line of each color signal throughout a duration of time equal to or longer than one horizontal period,

a step of normalizing the integrated value or a difference value between the integrated values of adjacent fields or adjacent frames with respect to each color signal,

a step of extracting a spectrum of the normalized integrated value or the normalized difference value with respect to each color signal,

a step of estimating a flicker component from the extracted spectrum with respect to each color signal, and

a step of performing a calculation operation on the estimated flicker component and the input image signal to cancel out the estimated flicker component with respect to each color signal.

3. A flicker reduction method for reducing a fluorescent light flicker component in both a luminance signal and each of color signals of colors, obtained by photographing a subject through an XY addressing type image pickup element under an illumination of a fluorescent lamp, comprising:

a step of inputting both luminance signal and color signals of colors,

a step of integrating each of the luminance signal and the color signal of each color, as an input image signal, with respect to each horizontal line of said luminance signal and each color signal throughout a duration of time equal to or longer than one horizontal period,

a step of normalizing the integrated value or a difference value between the integrated values of adjacent

fields or adjacent frames with respect to each color signal,

a step of extracting a spectrum of the normalized integrated value or the normalized difference value with respect to each color signal,

a step of estimating a flicker component from the extracted spectrum with respect to each color signal, and

a step of performing a calculation operation on the estimated flicker component and the input image signal to cancel out the estimated flicker component with respect to each color signal.

4. The flicker reduction method according to one of claims 1 to 3, wherein the normalizing step comprises dividing the difference value by the average value of the integrated values of a plurality of consecutive fields or consecutive frames.

5. The flicker reduction method according to one of claims 1 to 3, wherein the normalizing step comprises dividing the difference value by the average value of the integrated values of a plurality of consecutive fields or consecutive frames, and subtracting a predetermined value from the resulting quotient.

6. The flicker reduction method according to one of claims 1 to 3, wherein the normalizing step comprises dividing the difference value by the integrated value.

7. The flicker reduction method according to one of claims 1 to 3, wherein the spectrum extracting step comprises Fourier transforming the normalized integrated

value or the normalized difference value.

8. The flicker reduction method according to one of claims 1 to 3, wherein it is determined whether a level of the input image signal falls within a saturation region, and
5 if it is determined that the level of the input image signal falls within the saturation region, the input image signal is output as is as an output image signal.

9. The flicker reduction method according to one of claims 1 to 3, wherein it is determined based on a level of
10 the extracted spectrum whether the input image signal is from under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp, and if it is determined that the input image signal is not from under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp, the input image signal is output as is as an output image signal.

15 10. The flicker reduction method according to one of claims 1 to 3, wherein it is determined whether the subject changes greatly in a short period of time in response to an operation or an action of a photographer, and if it is determined that the subject changes greatly in a short
20 period of time, one of an immediately precedingly estimated flicker component and a flicker component estimated from an immediately preceding signal, and the input image signal are subjected to a calculation operation.

11. The flicker reduction method according to one of
25 claims 1 to 3, wherein it is determined whether a

photographing condition requires a flicker reduction operation and if it is determined that the flicker reduction operation is determined to be unnecessary, the input image signal is output as is as an output image signal.

12. The flicker reduction method according to one of claims 1 to 3, wherein the estimated flicker component is adjusted and the adjusted flicker component and the input image signal are subjected to the calculation operation.

13. The flicker reduction method according to one of claims 1 to 3, wherein amplification data and initial phase data of the estimated flicker component are adjusted through respective low-pass filters, and a flicker component to be subjected to the calculation operation together with the input image signal is generated using the adjusted amplification data and the adjusted initial phase data.

14. The flicker reduction method according to claim 13, wherein the adjusted amplitude data and the adjusted initial phase data are stored in a memory, and if a predetermined condition is detected, the flicker component to be subjected to the calculation operation together with the input image signal is generated using the stored amplitude data and the stored initial phase data.

15. An image pickup device comprising:

an XY addressing type image pickup element,
means for inputting color signal or luminance signal,
means for integrating a color signal or a luminance

signal, as an input image signal, with respect to each horizontal line of each color signal or said luminance signal throughout a duration of time equal to or longer than one horizontal period, the video signal or the luminance signal being obtained by photographing a subject through the XY addressing type image pickup element,

means for normalizing the integrated value or a difference value between the integrated values of adjacent fields or adjacent frames with respect to each color signal,

means for extracting a spectrum of the normalized integrated value or the normalized difference value with respect to each color signal,

means for estimating a flicker component from the extracted spectrum with respect to each color signal, and

means for performing a calculation operation on the estimated flicker component and the input image signal to cancel out the estimated flicker component with respect to each color signal.

16. An image pickup device comprising:

an XY addressing type image pickup element,

means for inputting color signals of colors,

means for integrating a color signal of each color, as an input image signal, with respect to each horizontal line of each color signal throughout a duration of time equal to or longer than one horizontal period, the color signal being obtained by photographing a subject through the XY addressing type image pickup element,

means for normalizing the integrated value or a difference value between the integrated values of adjacent fields or adjacent frames with respect to each color signal,

means for extracting a spectrum of the normalized integrated value or the normalized difference value with respect to each color signal,

means for estimating a flicker component from the extracted spectrum with respect to each color signal, and

means for performing a calculation operation on the estimated flicker component and the input image signal to cancel out the estimated flicker component with respect to each color signal.

17. An image pickup device comprising:

an XY addressing type image pickup element,

means for inputting both luminance signal and color signals of colors,

means for integrating each of a luminance signal and a color signal of each color, as an input image signal, with respect to each horizontal line of said luminance signal and each color signal throughout a duration of time equal to or longer than one horizontal period, the color signal and the luminance signal being obtained by photographing a subject through the XY addressing type image pickup element,

means for normalizing the integrated value or a difference value between the integrated values of adjacent fields or adjacent frames with respect to each color signal,

means for extracting a spectrum of the normalized integrated value or the normalized difference value with respect to each color signal,

means for estimating a flicker component from the extracted spectrum with respect to each color signal, and

means for performing a calculation operation on the estimated flicker component and the input image signal to cancel out the estimated flicker component with respect to each color signal.

18. The image pickup device according to one of claims
15 to 17, wherein the normalizing means divides the
difference value by the average value of the integrated
values of a plurality of consecutive fields or consecutive
5 frames.

19. The image pickup device according to one of claims
15 to 17, wherein the normalizing means divides the
difference value by the average value of the integrated
values of a plurality of consecutive fields or consecutive
10 frames, and subtracts a predetermined value from the
resulting quotient.

20. The image pickup device according to one of claims
15 to 17, wherein the normalizing means divides the
difference value by the integrated value.

15 21. The image pickup device according to one of claims
15 to 17, wherein the spectrum extracting means Fourier
transforms the normalized integrated value or the normalized
difference value.

20 22. The image pickup device according to one of claims
15 to 17, comprising means for determining whether a level
of the input image signal falls within a saturation region,
and outputting the input image signal as is as an output
image signal if it is determined that the level of the input
image signal falls within the saturation region.

25 23. The image pickup device according to one of claims

15 to 17, comprising means for determining, based on a level
of the spectrum extracted by the spectrum extracting means,
whether the input image signal is from under the
illumination of the fluorescent lamp, and outputting the
5 input image signal as is as an output image signal if it is
determined that the input image signal is not from under the
illumination of the fluorescent lamp.

24. The image pickup device according to one of claims
15 to 17, comprising means for determining whether the
10 subject changes greatly in a short period of time in
response to an operation or an action of a photographer, and
if it is determined that the subject changes greatly in a
short period of time, causing the calculating means to
subject to the calculation operation, one of a flicker
15 component immediately precedingly estimated by the flicker
component estimating means and a flicker component estimated
by the flicker component estimating means from an
immediately preceding signal, and the input image signal.

25. The image pickup device according to one of claims
20 15 to 17, comprising means for determining whether a
photographing condition requires a flicker reduction
operation and if it is determined that the flicker reduction
operation is unnecessary, outputting the input image signal
as is as an output image signal.

25 26. The image pickup device according to one of claims

15 to 17, comprising adjusting means for adjusting the flicker component estimated by the flicker component estimating means and generating the flicker component to be subjected to the calculation operation together with the input image signal.

27. The image pickup device according to one of claims 15 to 17, comprising low-pass filter means for adjusting amplification data and initial phase data of the flicker component estimated by the flicker component estimating means, and generating the flicker component to be subjected to the calculation operation together with the input image signal.

28. The image pickup device according to claim 27, comprising storage means for storing the amplitude data and the initial phase data, adjusted by the low-pass filter means, and

means for generating the flicker component to be subjected to the calculation operation together with the input image signal using the stored amplitude data and the stored initial phase data if a predetermined condition is detected.

29. A flicker reduction circuit for reducing a fluorescent light flicker component in a video signal or a luminance signal obtained by photographing a subject through an XY addressing type image pickup element under an

illumination of a fluorescent lamp, comprising:

means for inputting color signal or luminance signal,

means for integrating the color signal or the luminance signal, as an input image signal, with respect to each horizontal line of said luminance signal or each color signal throughout a duration of time equal to or longer than one horizontal period,

means for normalizing the integrated value or a difference value between the integrated values of adjacent fields or adjacent frames with respect to each color signal,

means for extracting a spectrum of the normalized integrated value or the normalized difference value with respect to each color signal,

means for estimating a flicker component from the extracted spectrum with respect to each color signal, and

means for performing a calculation operation on the estimated flicker component and the input image signal to cancel out the estimated flicker component with respect to each color signal.

30. A flicker reduction circuit for reducing a fluorescent light flicker component in each of color signals of colors obtained by photographing a subject through an XY addressing type image pickup element under an illumination of a fluorescent lamp, comprising:

means for inputting color signals of colors,

means for integrating the color signal of each color, as an input image signal, with respect to each horizontal line of each color signal throughout a duration of time equal to or longer than one horizontal period,

means for normalizing the integrated value or a difference value between the integrated values of adjacent fields or adjacent frames with respect to each color signal,

means for extracting a spectrum of the normalized integrated value or the normalized difference value with respect to each color signal,

means for estimating a flicker component from the extracted spectrum with respect to each color signal, and

means for performing a calculation operation on the estimated flicker component and the input image signal to cancel out the estimated flicker component with respect to each color signal.

31. A flicker reduction circuit for reducing a fluorescent light flicker component in each of a luminance signal and each of color signals of colors, obtained by photographing a subject through an XY addressing type image pickup element under an illumination of a fluorescent lamp, comprising:

means for inputting both luminance signal and color signals of colors,

means for integrating each of the luminance signal and the color signal of each color, as an input image signal, with respect to each horizontal line of said luminance signal and each color signal throughout a duration of time equal to or longer than one horizontal period,

means for normalizing the integrated value or a difference value between the integrated values of adjacent fields or adjacent frames with respect to each color signal,

means for extracting a spectrum of the normalized integrated value or the normalized difference value with respect to each color signal,

means for estimating a flicker component from the extracted spectrum with respect to each color signal, and

means for performing a calculation operation on the

estimated flicker component and the input image signal to cancel out the estimated flicker component with respect to each color signal.

32. The flicker reduction circuit according to one of claims 29 to 31, wherein the normalizing means divides the difference value by the average value of the integrated values of a plurality of consecutive fields or consecutive frames.

33. The flicker reduction circuit according to one of claims 29 to 31, wherein the normalizing means divides the difference value by the average value of the integrated values of a plurality of consecutive fields or consecutive frames, and subtracts a predetermined value from the resulting quotient.

34. The flicker reduction circuit according to one of claims 29 to 31, wherein the normalizing means divides the difference value by the integrated value.

35. The flicker reduction circuit according to one of claims 29 to 31, wherein the spectrum extracting means Fourier transforms the normalized integrated value or the normalized difference value.

36. The flicker reduction circuit according to one of claims 29 to 31, comprising means for determining whether a level of the input image signal falls within a saturation region, and outputting the input image signal as is as an output image signal if it is determined that the level of

the input image signal falls within the saturation region.

37. The flicker reduction circuit according to one of claims 29 to 31, comprising means for determining, based on a level of the spectrum extracted by the spectrum extracting means, whether the input image signal is from under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp, and outputting the input image signal as is as an output image signal if it is determined that the input image signal is not from under the illumination of the fluorescent lamp.

38. The flicker reduction circuit according to one of claims 29 to 31, comprising means, under the control of external means, for causing the calculating means to perform the calculation operation on one of the flicker component immediately precedingly estimated by the flicker component estimating means and the flicker component estimated by the flicker component estimating means based on an immediately prior signal, and the input image signal.

39. The flicker reduction circuit according to one of claims 29 to 31, comprising means for outputting the input image signal as is as an output image signal under the control of external means.

40. The flicker reduction circuit according to one of claims 29 to 31, comprising means for performing the calculation operation on the flicker component, estimated by the flicker component estimating means and adjusted by

external means, and the input image signal.