Readable Representations for Large-Scale Bipartite Graphs

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Abstract. Bipartite graphs appear in various scenes in the real world, and visualizing these graphs helps improve our understanding of network structures. The amount of information that is available to us has increased dramatically in recent years, and it is therefore necessary to develop a drawing technique that corresponds to large-scale graphs. In this paper, we describe drawing methods to make large-scale bipartite graphs easy to read. We propose two techniques: "node contraction drawing," which involves collecting similar nodes and drawing them as one node, and "isosimilarity contour drawing," which puts clusters into an outlined area. We developed interactive user interfaces for the drawing methods and conducted an evaluation experiment to demonstrate the effectiveness of the proposed techniques.

Keywords: information visualization, graph drawing, bipartite graph, anchored map, clustering.

1   Introduction

With the spread of information services, the quantity of information that can be obtained has been increasing significantly. When people obtain knowledge from information, their understanding is strengthened by extracting and "visualizing" the information. Therefore, research on visualization techniques is being done in various fields. However, using common methods, the larger the amount of data becomes, the lower the readability is of the visualization results. Thus, we need to investigate new visualization methods.

The purpose of this research is to improve "readability" in the visualization of large-scale graphs. For the representation of a large-scale network using techniques used to draw anchored maps [1,2], we aim to improve readability by adding new representations of specialized techniques for large-scale graphs.

2   Previous Knowledge

2.1   Bipartite Graphs

A graph is a logical structure composed of a collection of nodes and a collection of edges that connect pairs of nodes, and is befitted to represent associations

between some objects. A bipartite graph is a graph whose node set V can be divided into two disjoint sets V_1 and V_2 such that every edge $e(\in E)$ connects a node in V_1 and one in V_2, and we have $G = (V_1 \cup V_2, E)$. As in the example of relations between customers and commodities and between academic papers and authors, bipartite graphs appear in various real-world scenes, and they also appear in research fields [3]. In this paper, we focus on the networks represented as bipartite graphs.

2.2   Anchored Maps

One of the most common methods used to draw graphs is the spring embedder model proposed by Eades [4]. This model calculates a stable state of a virtual physical model that has been constructed by regarding edges in a graph as springs.

An anchored map is an advanced form of the spring embedder model, and it restricts nodes in one of two node sets of a bipartite graph to certain positions.

- Nodes in V_1 are arranged at even intervals on the circumference, and then
- Nodes in V_2 are arranged by the spring embedder model, with a suitable position to represent their relationships to nodes in V_1

We call nodes in V_1 "anchors" and nodes in V_2 "free nodes." Edges are represented in a way that connects the anchors and the free nodes in a straight line. Fig. 1 shows the visualization result of the network of relations between academic papers and their authors by using anchored maps. Authors are represented by rectangles and are fixed as anchors.

To improve the readability of anchored maps, anchors are arranged so as to reduce edge crossings and/or edge length[1]. However, when we draw a large-scale graph as an anchored map using the previous method [1], some problems occur in readability (see Fig. 1(b)). Large-scale graphs have a lot of nodes and edges for the drawing area, so the method of arranging the node layout makes it difficult to improve the readability. In previous studies a method of increasing the resolution of the display device and creating a very detailed drawing [5] was used, as well as a method of collecting several nodes and drawing them as one node [6,7]. However these methods do not allow the user to get a simultaneous overview as well as a detailed view of information. It is important for us to concisely draw a suitably sized graph that humans can recognize and understand.

3   Approach to Improve Readability

3.1   Readability of Graphs

When drawing a graph, the following situations should be distinguished: (1) we clearly see connections between nodes when there are few edge crossings,

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[1] Refer to [1] for more information on how to determine the positions of anchors.

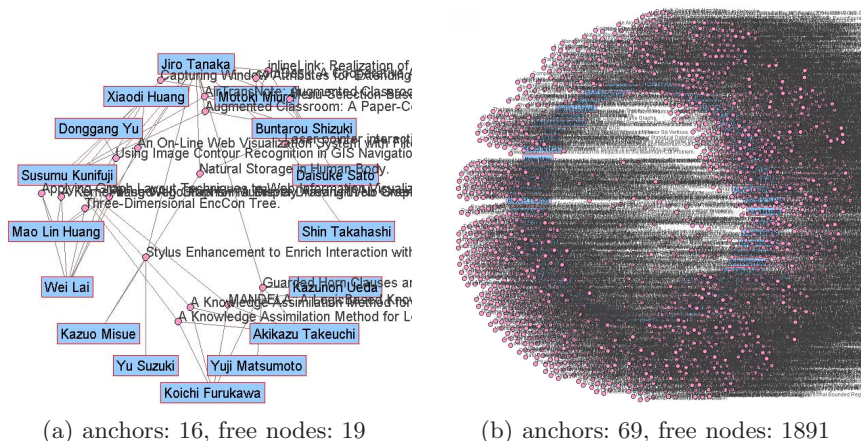(a) anchors: 16, free nodes: 19   (b) anchors: 69, free nodes: 1891

Fig. 1. Example of drawing a co-authorship network using an anchored map

and (2) we are aware of some information when there are crowded nodes or a concentration of edges. The readability in conventional graph drawings was not sufficient to make those differences very clear and seems to have mainly focused on attributes like (1). We think that attributes such as those in (2) are also important to obtain knowledge from network information. Attributes like those in (1) and (2) are referred to as "legible" and "graspable" respectively to distinguish one from another in this paper. We consider them both to be important attributes for readability.

3.2 Clustering of Nodes

The proposed method first clusters the graph in order to analyze its structure. We tried to improve readability by enabling readers to change the visualized graph dynamically using the result of this clustering.

In most cases, clustering in graph drawing involves grouping nodes that logically have the same connected structure into a cluster. But if a graph becomes larger, the number of such nodes decreases, and thus, it is not effective to cluster them.

Clustering in this paper means to calculate the similarity of nodes from the connected edge relationships and to generate hierarchical clustering. We used the Jaccard index to calculate the degree of similarity between nodes and the nearest neighbor method as a clustering algorithm.

4 Node Contraction Drawing

We developed "node contraction drawing" so that the scale of the whole graph will be sufficient for readers to recognize the features of the clusters. With this method, pack nodes are expressed using the cluster information, with the purpose being to improve legibility.
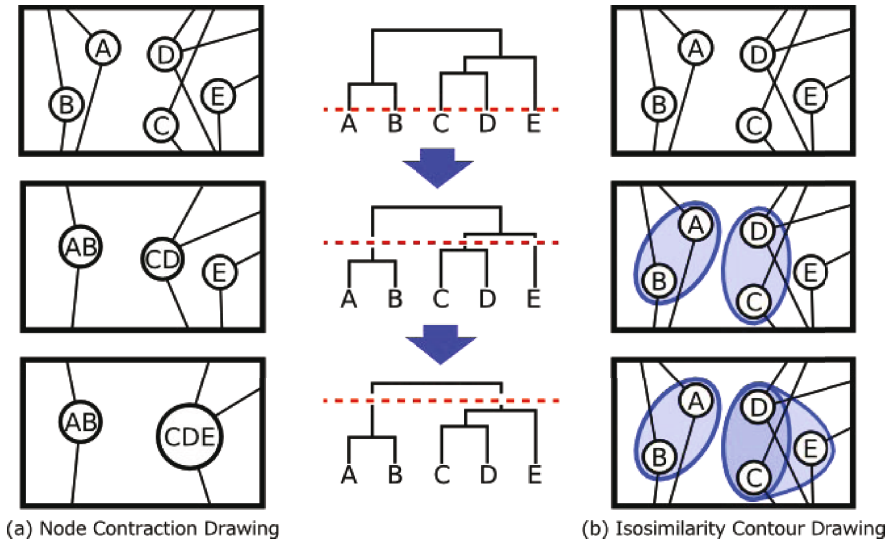
(a) Node Contraction Drawing   (b) Isosimilarity Contour Drawing

Fig. 2. Proposed representation model

Nodes are clustered according to the degree of similarity, from 0%–100%. A threshold value t ($0 \leq t \leq 100[\%]$) is given, and our method draws clusters when nodes have a higher similarity value than t.

The middle column in Fig. 2 shows a clustering structure in the form of a dendrogram. The elements at the bottom of the dendrogram are nodes, and all the branch points correspond to clusters. The dotted line crossing horizontally through the dendrogram represents the threshold value t. In our method, showing clusters with a higher similarity than t is synonymous with cutting the dendrogram horizontally and drawing only the node and the cluster connected to the edge of the cutting plane. Because the readers can change this t and see the resulting visualized graph, we achieve the effect of dynamic clustering. This way, we can obtain the most suitable graph visualization for each reader.

A slider is employed on the interface that changes threshold value t; its maximum value is set to 100%, and the minimum is set to 0%. If the slider has a minimum value, only one cluster aggregating all nodes will be drawn.

An effective technique to show in detail the gaze point of clustered graphs involves displaying only the nodes that are focused on. One of the purposes of visualization is to obtain related information about the nodes that we pay attention to. In this case, the information about the nodes in the cluster is important. Also, it is possible to expand the cluster with the above-mentioned slider, but there is the possibility that unnecessary nodes may also be expanded. Because of that, we implemented a function that expands one cluster that is appointed at one time, so that the appointed clusters are expanded one by one.

As a result, the logical structure of the nodes being focused on can be seen, and the readers are assisted in their appropriate recognition.

5   Isosimilarity Contour Drawing

We wanted to develop a new method of improving readability that was different from dynamic modification of clustering level, and we came up with the idea of focusing on the reader's viewpoint. This method involves drawing a closed curve surrounding highly related nodes using the cluster information, and its purpose is to improve graspability. We named this method "isosimilarity contour drawing."

An effective way to show what humans fixate their eyes on is to indicate the important parts with a surrounding line. The formation of clusters can be recognized from the result even if clustering is not used. However, we aim to improve the recognition of the relations between nodes by actively displaying the result of clustering using a contour line.

The hierarchy clustering used in this research has a tree structure. It is possible to represent it using a nested structure. In an isosimilarity contour drawing, original nodes and edges are always drawn. If the dendrogram is cut horizontally, the clusters under the cut line are drawn. The cluster is represented as a closed curve that encloses all the included nodes.

The interface of this method also includes a slider, where we can interactively change the threshold value to draw contours. When moving the slider in the negative direction, the number of contours increases until finally all nodes are surrounded by the biggest contours.

In this method, the contours are drawn as closed lines filled with a transparent blue color. By using a transparent color, overlapping of clusters can be represented. The rate of transparency is proportional to the degree of similarity of clusters. The higher the degree of similarity is, the lower the rate of transparency will be. Clusters that have closely related nodes and many layers are drawn with a denser color.

6   Drawing Examples

As an example, we visualized the network of coauthorships of papers obtained from DBLP[2] (anchors(authors): 69, free nodes (papers): 1891, edges: 2222). Because of the large number of nodes, when using a normal anchored map, it is difficult to understand the contents of the network (Fig. 1(b)).

The visualization results of the network using the node contraction drawing method are shown in Fig. 3(a),(c), and (e). When the node contraction drawing is activated and the slider is moved to 100%, the number of free nodes becomes about 150. The amount of free nodes having the same connections is very large, as papers tend to be written by the same group of coauthors. When the slider is moved to 50%, some papers remain in the center of the drawing area. These papers were written by an unusual group of coauthors, and we suppose that they connect several communities.

Fig. 3(d) and (f) shows the visualization result of the network using the isosimilarity contour drawing. The labels of free nodes have been omitted. The original
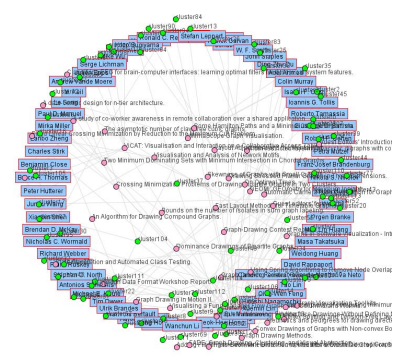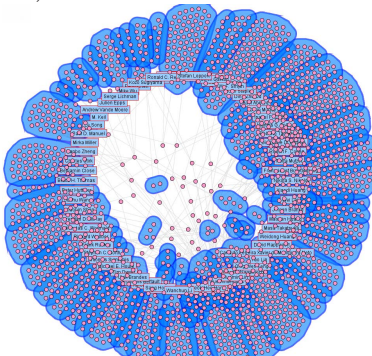
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[2] http://dblp.uni-trier.de
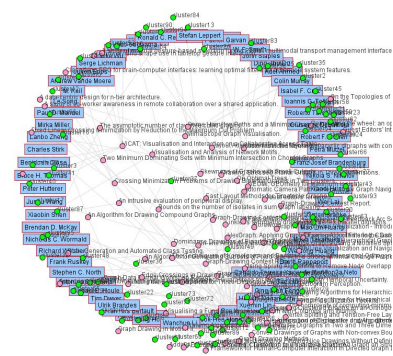
(a) Node contraction drawing $t = 100\%$
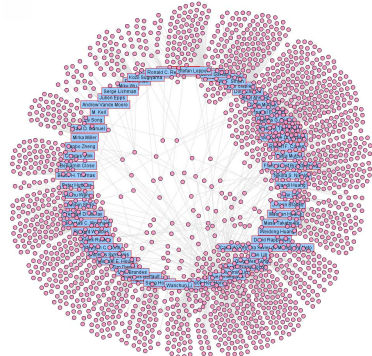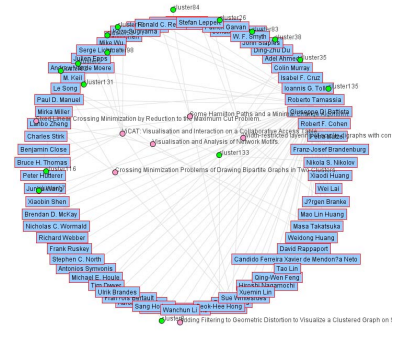

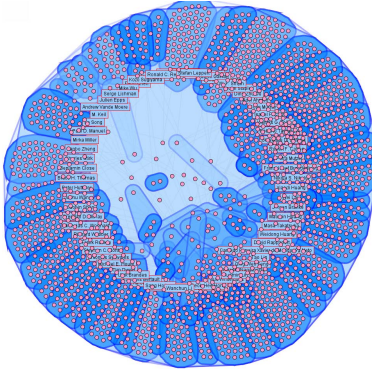(b) Anchored map drawing (no labels)

(c) Node contraction drawing $t = 60\%$

(d) Isosimilarity contour drawing $t = 100\%$ (no labels)

(e) Node contraction drawing $t = 50\%$

(f) Isosimilarity contour drawing $t = 0\%$ (no labels)

Fig. 3. Visualization results of relation between academic papers and their coauthors by using proposed representations

drawing as an anchored map without labels is shown in Fig. 3(b). We cannot see the contents of nodes from the figures, but we can recognize that the nodes with the highest similarity are placed at the circumference, nodes with higher similarity are at the bottom right in the center, and the nodes with lower similarity are in the center. We obtained the knowledge that this graph has a simple clustered structure.

7   Evaluation and Discussion

We conducted a user study to examine whether legibility and graspability were improved with our method. In the experiment, we used a graph of the relations between companies managing convenience stores and the number of their stores in prefectures in Japan, and we selected eight students (aged from 21 to 30) majoring in computer science as subjects. The subjects were asked to browse each graph drawn as a normal anchored map, the node contraction drawing, and the isosimilarity contour drawing. They were allowed to move the slider freely to change the value of t so that their favorite drawing was provided. They were then asked some questions.

Table 1 and Table 2 present the results of the experiment. In the node contraction drawing, five people answered legible and their preferable threshold values are less than 100%. Based on these results, we believe that this method improved readability. The change of the threshold by the user was effective because the threshold value t when the drawing is thought to be most legible is different for each subject. In the isosimilarity contour drawing, only two people answered legible, but five people answered that they obtained new knowledge. Therefore, we think that we were able to improve graspability with this method.

The node contraction drawing was designed to improve the legibility of the networks, but graspability might also be improved. A static image of a

Table 1. Experimental results of node contraction drawing

evaluation item \ subject	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Is the drawing legible?	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	N	N	N
Preferable threshold value of t	80%	70%	85%	74%	75%	—	—	70%
Did you obtain new knowledge?	**Y**	N	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	N	**Y**

Table 2. Experimental results of isosimilarity drawing

evaluation item \ subject	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Is the drawing legible?	N	**Y**	?	N	N	**Y**	N	N
Preferable thereshold value of t	—	90%	94%	—	100%	80%	—	85%
Did you obtain new knowledge?	N	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	**Y**	N	**Y**

All questions were asked in Japanese. "**Y**" indicates a Yes answer, "N" is No, "?" means Not able to judge, and "—" means No answer. Preferable threshold value of t means value of t when drawing is thought to be legible.

contraction drawing with a fixed threshold value is not very effective. The process in which the users move the slider and change the visualized graph brings improved graspability.

The isosimilarity contour drawing was designed to improve the graspability of networks. Because this method is different from node contraction drawing, and original nodes remain without being combined, node relationships can be read from one fragmentary still image. We believe this method provides a good overview of the networks. This method is effective with a high threshold value and is suitable for observing the closely related nodes.

8   Conclusion

We proposed two visualization techniques to improve the readability of large-scale bipartite graphs and described their effectiveness. We developed a graph drawing tool by using hierarchical clustering. The tool provides a user interface to change the view of graphs from an overview to a detailed view and provides drawings with high readability. We developed the technique for anchored maps, but it is thought to be applicable to other styles of graph drawing, too. Some of our goals in the future include to find a way to avoid meaningless overlaps of contours and to make appropriate labels of nodes integrated by clustering.

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