Foreword to the Special Issue on Big Data in Remote Sensing

Big Data is a very important topic in many research areas. In 2008, a Special Issue on this topic was published in *Nature*, which raised a great interest from the academic perspective. On March 2012, the United States government unveiled a “Big Data Initiative” [1].

As part of the data sharing planning by American Obama government in 2009, big data for remote sensing applications is now freely available under NASA’s Open Government Initiative. Furthermore, the data from other governments or organizations are becoming more widely open (or open via negotiations), such as Chinese Earth Observation (EO) data (e.g., land-cover HJ series, Oceanic HY series, and meteorological FY series) and Europe Space Agency (ESA) EO data provided via an international cooperation “Dragon project” started by ESA and the Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST). These data sets comprise different spectral bandwidths (dimensionality), spatial resolutions, and radiometric resolutions. The current estimations are that remotely sensed data are now being collected following a Petabyte level growth per day over the world. Also, other related data sets have been generated from different areas, such as social media data including pictures and tags uploaded by personal users to the Web which, for instance, can help improving the classification accuracy in land cover applications [2]. As a result, big data is becoming an “economic asset, like currency or gold” and we are in “the Age of Big Data” [3].

This Special Issue on Big Data in Remote Sensing is intended to introduce the latest techniques to manage, exploit, process, and analyze big data in remote sensing applications. It contains 11 papers that exhibit the latest advances in Big Data in Remote Sensing. To understand big data, usually three facets should be taken into account from owning data, data methods, and data applications, which contribute together to a single big data life cycle [2], including identification of applications, data collections, data processing, data analysis, data visualization, data evaluation, and so on. Here, data computing should be carried out in all the steps. In the Special Issue, a big data life cycle for remote sensing applications is presented to collect, process, and analyze massive remote sensing data for decision making in a real-time big data analytical architecture [4]. In particular, big data analysis techniques should be designed to deal with the remote sensing problems to get insight of big data in remote sensing, such as the affinity search strategy based on a graph [5]. The processing and analyzing big data are usually dealt with in a distributed or in a cloud environment through high-throughput or high-performance computing. In [6], different parallelization techniques are discussed in terms of support vector classifiers (SVCs) by turning big data to smart data. Also, SVC implemented in graphics processing units (GPUs) is presented in [7] and a distributed hyperspectral image endmember extraction algorithm is carried out by an artificial bee colony algorithm [8]. A scalable Web service for near real-time land cover mapping is provided in a cloud computing (CC) environment in terms of high-resolution remote sensing images [9]. Also, processing deformation maps and time series of differential synthetic aperture radar interferometry (DInSAR) is carried out in particular in an Amazon Web Services (AWS) CC platform [10]. Furthermore, a visualization strategy is utilized to label SAR images based on an active learning algorithm [11]. A multistratified spatial sampling approach is developed to evaluate the quality of remote sensing derived products in [12]. Finally, big data applications are described to manage Eolic parks by remote sensing data [13] and to jointly detect Web events with remote sensing data [14].

MINGMIN CHI, *Guest Editor*
School of Computer Science
Shanghai Key Laboratory of Data Science
Key Laboratory for Information Science of Electromagnetic Waves (MoE)
Fudan University
Shanghai, China

ANTONIO J. PLAZA, *Guest Editor*
Department of Technology of Computers and Communications
University of Extremadura
Cáceres E-10003, Spain

JÓN ATLI BENEDIKTSSÓN, *Guest Editor*
Faculty of Electrical and Computer Engineering
University of Iceland
Reykjavik 101, Iceland

BING ZHANG, *Guest Editor*
Institute of Remote Sensing and Digital Earth
Chinese Academy of Sciences
Beijing 100094, China

BORMIN HUANG, *Guest Editor*
Space Science and Engineering Center
University of Wisconsin—Madison
Madison, WI 53706 USA

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REFERENCES


Mingmin Chi (M’05) received the B.S. and M.S. degrees in electrical engineering from Changchun University of Science and Technology, Changchun, China, and Xiamen University, Xiamen, China in 1998 and 2002, respectively, and the Ph.D. degree in computer science from the University of Trento, Trento, Italy, in 2006.

She was a Student Visitor from May 2005 to March 2006 at the Department of Schoolkopf, Max-Planck Institute for Biological Cybernetics, Tuebingen, Germany. Currently, she is an Associate Professor with the School of Computer Science, Shanghai Key Laboratory of Data Science, Fudan University, Shanghai, China. Her research interests include data science, big data, and machine learning with applications to remote sensing and social media.

Dr. Chi is an Associate Editor for the IEEE Journal of Selected Topics in Applied Earth Observations and Remote Sensing from 2013.

Antonio Plaza (M’05–SM’07–F’15) received the Computer Engineering degree and the M.Sc. and Ph.D. degrees in computer engineering from the University of Extremadura, Badajoz, Spain, in 1998, 2000, and 2002, respectively.

He is an Associate Professor (with accreditation for Full Professor) with the Department of Technology of Computers and Communications, University of Extremadura, where he is the Head of the Hyperspectral Computing Laboratory (HyperComp). He was the Coordinator of the Hyperspectral Imaging Network, a European project with total funding of 2.8 M Euro (2007–2011). He has authored more than 370 publications, including more than 100 JCR journal papers (60 in IEEE journals), 20 book chapters, and over 230 peer-reviewed conference proceeding papers (90 in IEEE conferences). He has guest-edited seven special issues on JCR journals (three in IEEE journals).

Prof. Plaza has been a Chair for the IEEE Workshop on Hyperspectral Image and Signal Processing: Evolution in Remote Sensing, in 2011. He is also an Associate Editor for the IEEE Geoscience and Remote Sensing Magazine. He was a member of the Editorial Board of the IEEE Geoscience and Remote Sensing Newsletter from 2011 to 2012 and a member of the Steering Committee of the IEEE Journal of Selected Topics in Applied Earth Observations and Remote Sensing in 2012. He served as the Director of Education Activities for the IEEE Geoscience and Remote Sensing Society (GRSS) during 2011–2012, and has been currently serving as the President of the Spanish Chapter of the IEEE GRSS since November 2012. He has been currently serving as the Editor-in-Chief of the IEEE TRANSACTIONS ON GEOSCIENCE AND REMOTE SENSING Journal since January 2013. He was the recipient of the recognition of Best Reviewers of the IEEE Geoscience and Remote Sensing Letters in 2009 and the recognition of Best Reviewers of the IEEE TRANSACTIONS ON GEOSCIENCE AND REMOTE SENSING in 2010, a journal for which he has served as Associate Editor from 2007 to 2012.
**Jón Atli Benediktsson** (S’84–M’90–SM’99–F’04) received the Cand.Sci. degree in electrical engineering from the University of Iceland, Reykjavik, Iceland, in 1984, and the M.S.E.E. and Ph.D. degrees from Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN, USA, in 1987 and 1990, respectively.

On July 1, 2015, he became the Rector of the University of Iceland. From 2009 to 2015, he was the Pro Rector of Science and Academic Affairs and a Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering at the University of Iceland. He is a Co-Founder of the biomedical start company Oxymap. He has authored extensively in his research fields. His research interests include remote sensing, biomedical analysis of signals, pattern recognition, image processing, and signal processing.

Prof. Benediktsson was the 2011–2012 President of the *IEEE Geoscience and and Remote Sensing Society* (GRSS) and has been on the GRSS AdCom since 2000. He was the Editor-in-Chief of the *IEEE Transactions on Geoscience and Remote Sensing* (TGRS) from 2003 to 2008 and has been serving as Associate Editor of TGRS since 1999, the *IEEE Geoscience and Remote Sensing Letters* since 2003, and *IEEE Access* since 2013. He is on the Editorial Board of the *Proceedings of the IEEE*, the International Editorial Board of the *International Journal of Image and Data Fusion*, and was the Chairman of the Steering Committee of *IEEE Journal of Selected Topics in Applied Earth Observations and Remote Sensing* (J-STARS) 2007–2010. He is a Fellow of SPIE. He is a member of the 2014 IEEE Fellow Committee. He is a member of the Association of Chartered Engineers in Iceland (VFI), Societas Scinetiarum Islandica and Tau Beta Pi. He was the recipient of the Stevan J. Kristof Award from Purdue University in 1991 as outstanding graduate student in remote sensing, the Icelandic Research Council’s Outstanding Young Researcher Award in 1997, the IEEE Third Millennium Medal in 2000, the University of Iceland’s Technology Innovation Award in 2004, the Yearly Research Award from the Engineering Research Institute of the University of Iceland in 2006, the Outstanding Service Award from the IEEE Geoscience and Remote Sensing Society in 2007, and the IEEE/VFI Electrical Engineer of the Year Award in 2013. He was the co-recipient of the 2012 IEEE TRANSACTIONS ON GEOSCIENCE AND REMOTE SENSING Paper Award and the IEEE GRSS Highest Impact Paper Award in 2013 and the International Journal of Image and Data Fusion Best Paper Award in 2014.

**Bing Zhang** is a Full Professor and the Deputy Director of the Institute of Remote Sensing and Digital Earth, CAS, Beijing, China (660 researchers and 230 Ph.D. students). He is specialized in hyperspectral remote sensing with more than 18 years of experience in this field. He has coordinated and is coordinating many important projects with overall budget of 50 million RMB (6.2 Meuros). He has authored or coauthored around 150 publications, including more than 100 JCR journal papers and more than 50 peer-reviewed international conference papers. He has written 4 books especially in hyperspectral remote sensing area, which serve as the main materials for education and research in China. His research interests include the development of physics-based models and image processing software for the use of hyperspectral remote sensing data in solving problems in various contexts.

Prof. Zhang had a variety of editorial responsibilities in international journals and conferences. He was the recipient of 7 Chinese National, Ministerial, and Provincial S&T Progress Awards in total in the past 10 years.

**Bormin Huang** received the M.S.E. degree in aerospace engineering from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA, in 1992, and the Ph.D. degree in satellite remote sensing from the University of Wisconsin—Madison, WI, USA, in 1998.

He was with the NASA Langley Research Center, Hampton, VA, USA, from 1998 to 2001, and is currently a Research Scientist and Principal Investigator with the Space Science and Engineering Center, University of Wisconsin—Madison. His research interests include remote sensing science and engineering, satellite data compression and communications, remote sensing signal, image and video processing, remote sensing forward modeling and inverse problems, and high-performance computing.

Dr. Huang is a Fellow of SPIE and a Honorary International Chair Professor at the National Taipei University of Technology. Dr. Huang has been serving as a founding Chair for the SPIE Conference on Satellite Data Compression, Communications, and Processing since 2004, for the SPIE Europe Conference on High Performance Computing in Remote Sensing since 2011, and for the IEEE International Workshop on Parallel and Distributed Computing in Remote Sensing, in conjunction with the IEEE International Conference on Parallel and Distributed Systems, since 2011. He has also served as the Chair for the Conference on Imaging Spectrometer Technologies and Applications, in conjunction with the 2013 International Symposium on Photonic Detection and Imaging. He is serving as an Associate Editor for the *IEEE Journal of Selected Topics in Applied Earth Observations and Remote Sensing*, and for the *Journal of Applied Remote Sensing*. 