ADNet: An Asymmetric Dual-Stream Network for RGB-T Salient Object Detection

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ABSTRACT
RGB-Thermal salient object detection (RGB-T SOD) aims to locate salient objects in images that include both RGB and thermal information. Previous approaches often suggest designing a symmetric network structure to tackle the challenge of dealing with low-quality RGB or thermal images. However, we contend that RGB and thermal modalities possess different numbers of channels and disparities in information density. In this paper, we propose a novel asymmetric dual-stream network (ADNet). Specifically, we leverage an asymmetric backbone to extract four stages of RGB features and four stages of thermal features. To enable effective interaction among low-level features in the first two stages, we introduce the Channel-Spatial Interaction (CSI) module. In the last two stages, deep features are enhanced using the Self-Attention Enhancement (SAE) module. Experimental results on the VTS5000, VT1000, and VT821 datasets attest to the superior performance of our proposed ADNet compared to state-of-the-art methods.

CCS CONCEPTS
• Computing methodologies → Object detection; Image segmentation; Artificial intelligence; Computer vision.

KEYWORDS
RGB-T salient object detection, multi-head self attention, cross attention, cross-modal fusion.

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1 INTRODUCTION
RGB-Thermal salient object detection (RGB-T SOD) aims to detect and precisely segment salient objects present in visible and thermal image pairs [42]. It finds wide applications in automatic cropping [34], autonomous driving [1], and semantic segmentation [8].

Figure 1: Examples of special cases in the RGB-T SOD dataset including low-quality RGB images caused by insufficient lighting, blurring, and low-quality thermal images caused by similar temperatures.

Figure 1: Examples of special cases in the RGB-T SOD dataset including low-quality RGB images caused by insufficient lighting, blurring, and low-quality thermal images caused by similar temperatures.
has evolved, the RGB-T SOD method based on it has emerged gradually [12, 15]. The Transformer-based RGB-T SOD method significantly enhances detection accuracy, yet it often exhibits a large number of computational parameters, hindering its deployment on edge or embedded devices. Consequently, the Transformer-based SOD methods should prioritize lightweight design.

Previous research in the field of RGB-T SOD acknowledges the equal significance of the thermal mode compared to the RGB modality [12, 15], and advocates the use of a dual-stream symmetrical structure to address potential damage in RGB images or corruption in thermal images. However, there exists a noticeable information density gap between the RGB and thermal modes. The thermal mode should serve as an auxiliary and complementary modality to the RGB mode. Consequently, employing symmetric networks would result in inefficient utilization of computing resources. Recent studies on the RGB-depth task have proposed asymmetric networks [13]. These networks employ a Transformer model in the RGB mode and a lightweight CNN model in the depth mode, simultaneously preserving detection effectiveness and reducing model complexity. Due to the presence of RGB image corruptions in the RGB-T dataset, such as extreme darkness or blurring, employing a lightweight CNN structure would severely impair detection performance. Consequently, achieving effective fusion becomes challenging, and in cases where RGB image information is incomplete, the thermal modes exhibit a deficiency in capturing global features, leading to inadequate detection of salient regions.

In this paper, we propose an asymmetric network ADNet based on lightweight Transformer. Initially, RGB features are extracted using an undisclosed backbone architecture inspired by Swin-B and Mobilevit. Subsequently, interaction with the low-level features is performed using the Channel-Spatial Interaction (CSI) module, which incorporates channel attention and spatial attention mechanisms. Deep features are subsequently enhanced using the Self-Attention Enhancement (SAE) module. Finally, the predicted salient objects are obtained through the decoder. Experiments show that our method preserves the performance of the results while reducing the model complexity.

In summary, we make three main contributions: (1) We introduce the first asymmetric network for RGB-T salient object detection. Experimental results demonstrate that our method achieves superior performance, reducing the number of parameters by approximately 46% and the computational load by around 40%. (2) We introduce a CSI module for low-level features, enabling the model to better leverage the CNN’s capability to emphasize local features. Additionally, we present an SAE module for enhancing deep features, improving attention on salient regions by enhancing global features in both the RGB branch and the thermal branch.

2 RELATED WORK

2.1 RGB-T SOD

Due to their illumination invariance, thermal images are suitable for object detection in complex scenes with dim light and cluttered backgrounds. Early RGB-T SOD methods mainly used machine learning techniques to learn cross-modal feature representations [18, 29]. Wang et al. [32] created the first RGB-T SOD benchmark dataset named VT821 and proposed a graph-based multi-task manifold ranking algorithm to fuse RGB and thermal data. Tu et al. [30] adopted a multi-mode multi-scale manifold ranking and cooperative graph learning algorithm to achieve cross-modal salient object detection. They also built a more challenging dataset, VT1000.

With the development of deep learning, Tu et al. [28] contributed a large dataset VT5000 and proposed a baseline model that combines CNN and attention mechanisms. Tu et al. [26] proposed a dual-decoder with multi-interactions to integrate multi-stage interactions of bimodal and global context. Huo et al. [10] proposed a context-guided stacked refinement network to fuse the two modalities, which used light CNN as backbone. Cong et al. [2] introduced a global illumination estimation module to predict the global illuminance score of the image, so as to regulate the role played by the two modalities. Ma et al. [17] proposed a spatial complementary fusion module to explore the complementary local regions between RGB-T images. With the development of Transformer, Liu et al. [15] proposed an RGB-T SOD method based on Swin Transformer. Feature extraction and feature interaction fusion are two key issues in the RGB-T SOD task.

2.2 Vision Transformer for SOD

The breakthrough progress of Transformers [31] in NLP encouraged researchers to apply them to computer vision. Dosovitskiy et al. [4] first proposed the ViT model based on Transformers for large-scale supervised image classification. Liu et al. [14] proposed Swin Transformer with shifted window operations and hierarchical design, achieving good performance on various image/video tasks.

To address the high computational cost of Transformer, Sachin et al. [21] proposed Mobilevit, which fuses MobileNet and ViT, achieving outstanding performance on lightweight networks.

Many researchers have also applied Transformers to SOD tasks. For example, Ren et al. [24] and Zhu et al. [44] applied an encoder based purely on Transformer for single-modal SOD, while some studies [41] used a PVT [35] and CNN hybrid structure for feature extraction and salient map prediction. Some studies [16] separately modeled RGB and depth features based on a pure Transformer architecture. Liu et al. [15] used the Swin Transformer [14] encoder to extract features from RGB and thermal/deep images, and then achieved cross-modal fusion for SOD with edge guidance. Pang et al. [22] proposed a cross-modal view-mixed transformer to construct a top-down transformer-based information propagation path. Transformer-based methods achieve better performance due to their ability to capture global features, but at the cost of significantly higher parameters and computations.

3 METHOD

3.1 Overview

The framework of our proposed model is shown in Figure 2. It consists of an asymmetric dual-stream backbone as the feature extraction module, a Channel-Spatial Interaction module to fuse the low-level features, a Self-Attention Enhancement module to enhance the deep features, and finally a decoder to give the salient object prediction.
Table 1: The output feature map sizes of different stages for RGB and thermal modalities, where stage 0 represents the feature map before the feature extractor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Size of $F_{rgb}$</th>
<th>Size of $F_{thermal}$</th>
<th>Size of $F_{fusion}$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>stage 0</td>
<td>[128, 96, 96]</td>
<td>[16, 192, 192]</td>
<td>/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stage 1</td>
<td>[128, 96, 96]</td>
<td>[64, 96, 96]</td>
<td>[64, 96, 96]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stage 2</td>
<td>[256, 48, 48]</td>
<td>[96, 48, 48]</td>
<td>[64, 48, 48]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stage 3</td>
<td>[512, 24, 24]</td>
<td>[128, 24, 24]</td>
<td>[64, 24, 24]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stage 4</td>
<td>[1024, 12, 12]</td>
<td>[640, 12, 12]</td>
<td>[64, 12, 12]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 Asymmetric Dual-stream Backbone

Previous studies utilize a dual-stream backbone for extracting features from both RGB and thermal modalities. Through the analysis of feature maps at each stage, we observe that an asymmetric structure effectively attends to both local and global features. Figure 3 illustrates the feature maps of the dual-stream Swin-B in the top two rows, and the feature maps extracted by our proposed asymmetric dual-stream backbone in the middle two rows. The Mobilevit-based backbone predominantly emphasizes low-level features, the Swin-B-based backbone primarily focuses on high-level features, whereas our asymmetric backbone effectively captures both low-level and high-level features.

RGB Feature Extractor. We use a pretrained Swin-B as the backbone for the RGB modality, taking inputs of size 384x384. It first splits the input into a series of patches and then proceeds through four stages where the number of channels is doubled and the feature map size is halved at each stage. Through the RGB modality backbone, we can obtain a set of five feature maps with different resolutions that $F_{rgb} = \{F_{rgb}^{i} | i = 0, 1, 2, 3, 4\}$.

Thermal Feature Extractor. The thermal modality utilizes a pretrained Mobilevit model as its backbone, with inputs consisting of infrared images of the same size as the RGB modality. Initially, it performs a 3 × 3 convolution to extract local features from the image. Subsequently, following the RGB branch, the backbone is divided into four stages, with the number of channels doubling and the resolution halving at each stage, as depicted in Table 1. Through the thermal modality backbone, we also obtain a set of five feature maps with different sizes $F_{t} = \{F_{t}^{i} | i = 0, 1, 2, 3, 4\}$.

The features of stage 1 to stage 4 from both the RGB and thermal modalities are resized to 64 channels using a 1 × 1 convolution, and subsequently inputted into the CSI module.

3.3 Channel-Spatial Interaction Module

Based on our analysis in Figure 3, it is observed that CNN is better at extracting low-level features, while Transformer is better at extracting high-level features. As a result, we propose a method to combine the strengths of both structures by incorporating feature interaction attention layers between the extracted feature layers to enhance the interaction of RGB and thermal modes.

For designing the modality interaction, we employ both the channel attention mechanism and the spatial attention mechanism [38]. We take the features extracted in stages 1 to 4 of the two modalities respectively, denoting two groups of features as $F_{rgb} = \{F_{rgb}^{i} | i = 1, 2, 3, 4\}$ and $F_{t} = \{F_{t}^{i} | i = 1, 2, 3, 4\}$.

Figure 4 illustrates that, at each layer $i$, the feature maps of the RGB and thermal branches are initially concatenated as $F_{fusion}^{i}$:

$$F_{fusion}^{i} = \text{Concat}(F_{rgb}^{i}, F_{t}^{i}).$$

Next, the channel attention of the fused modality is computed:

$$CA^{i} = \text{Sigmoid}(\text{MLP}(P_{avg}(F_{fusion}^{i}))) + \text{MLP}(P_{max}(F_{fusion}^{i}))).$$

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where $CA^i$ means channel attention operation, $i \in \{1, 2, 3, 4\}$, $\text{Sigmoid}(\cdot)$ means the sigmoid activation function, $\text{MLP}(\cdot)$ is a two-layer perceptron. $P_{\text{avg}}(\cdot)$ and $P_{\text{max}}(\cdot)$ represent the global max-pooling and average pooling, respectively.

Subsequently, we calculate the spatial attention $SA^i_{\text{rgb}}$ and $SA^i_{\text{t}}$ for each individual modality $F^i_{\text{rgb}}$ and $F^i_{\text{t}}$, respectively:

$$SA^i_{\text{rgb}} = \text{Sigmoid}(\text{Conv}^{7 \times 7}(\text{Concat}(P_{\text{avg}}(F^i_{\text{rgb}}), P_{\text{max}}(F^i_{\text{rgb}})))),$$

$$SA^i_{\text{t}} = \text{Sigmoid}(\text{Conv}^{i \times 7}(\text{Concat}(P_{\text{avg}}(F^i_{\text{t}}), P_{\text{max}}(F^i_{\text{t}}))))$$

where $\text{Sigmoid}(\cdot)$ denotes the sigmoid activation function, $\text{Conv}^{7 \times 7}$ means convolution operation with the kernel size $7 \times 7$, $P_{\text{avg}}(\cdot)$ and $P_{\text{max}}(\cdot)$ represent the global max-pooling and average pooling.

Thirdly, we combine the channel attention and spatial attention to derive the fused attention for the two modalities using the following procedure:

$$\text{Att}^i_{\text{rgb}} = SA^i_{\text{rgb}} \times \text{Conv}^{3 \times 3}(F^i_{\text{fusion}} \times CA^i),$$

$$\text{Att}^i_{\text{t}} = SA^i_{\text{t}} \times \text{Conv}^{3 \times 3}(F^i_{\text{fusion}} \times CA^i),$$

where $SA^i_{\text{rgb}}$ and $SA^i_{\text{t}}$ means the spatial attention, $CA^i$ and $CA^i_{\text{rgb}}$ means the channel attention, $\text{Att}^i_{\text{rgb}}$ and $\text{Att}^i_{\text{t}}_{\text{rgb}}$ denotes the fused attention.

Lastly, we add $\text{Att}^i_{\text{rgb}}$ and $\text{Att}^i_{\text{t}}$ to the original feature maps, obtaining features that incorporate information from the interaction.

### 3.4 Self-Attention Enhancement Module

Deep features, in contrast to shallow features, exhibit a heightened focus on the semantic information within the image, enabling them to further prioritize salient regions. We propose to enhance feature maps by employing multi-head self-attention (MHSA) [31] for deep features. We define the multi-head attention mechanism $\text{MultiHeadAtt}(q, k, v)$ as follows:

$$\text{MultiHeadAtt}(q, k, v) = \text{Concat}(\text{Head}_1, ..., \text{Head}_h)v_{\omega_{\text{q}}},$$

where $q$, $k$ and $v$ are the same feature map as input, $(\text{Head}_1, ..., \text{Head}_h)$ means to split the input into several heads, here we take the head as 8. $\omega_q$ represents the matrix of the final linear transformation. Then, we calculate attention $\text{Head}_i$ for each head:

$$\text{Head}_i = \text{Attention}(Q_i, K_i, V_i) = \text{Softmax} \left( \frac{Q_iK_i^T}{\sqrt{d_k}} \right) \cdot V_i,$$

where $T$ represents the matrix transpose operation, $d_k$ is a scaling factor, here equal to $\text{dim}_{\text{model}}/\text{num}_{\text{heads}}$, $d_{\text{model}}$ is equal to the number of channels of the input feature map 64, and $\text{num}_{\text{heads}}$ is equal to 8, $Q, K,$ and $V$ is computed by:

$$Q_i = W_q^i \cdot q,$$

$$K_i = W_k^i \cdot k,$$

$$V_i = W_v^i \cdot v,$$

where $q, k$ and $v$ are the input feature map, $W_q^i, W_k^i, W_v^i$ correspond to linear transformation matrix of query, key and value.

In this module, we aim to use an 8-head attention mechanism for the features extracted from the input in stage4 and stage5, namely, $(F^4_{\text{rgb}}, F^4_{\text{t}})$ and $(F^5_{\text{rgb}}, F^5_{\text{t}})$. Specifically, we first decompose $Q, K,$ and $V$ into $h$ heads, and then calculate attentions for each $h$. We then concatenate and project them to obtain the final output. By adding multi-head self-attention to the original feature map, we can enhance the feature of $h$ heads, and calculate attentions of each $h$. Next, we concatenate and practice the final projection to obtain the final output. We can obtain an enhanced feature representation by adding multi-head self-attention to the original feature map.

### 3.5 Decoder

Based on previous work [37], we adopt the residual block structure to construct a convolutional decoder. In total, the model comprises 4 residual blocks, with each block consisting of a $3 \times 3$ convolutional layer, 64 output channels, a BatchNorm layer, and a ReLU activation function. The output of each residual block is upsampled using bilinear interpolation to match the input size of the subsequent residual block.

This upsampling decoder gradually recovers high-dimensional feature maps through multi-scale feature extraction and upsampling. We send two sets of transformed feature maps $(F^i_{\text{rgb}})$ and $(F^i_{\text{t}})$ into two decoders, and then the output of the decoder is concatenated to form a fused result.
where BCE loss stands for binary cross entropy loss [3], SSIM loss represents structural similarity index measure [36], IoU loss denotes intersection over union loss [20]. The total loss function consists of three components:

\[
L = L_{rgb} + L_{thermal} + L_{fusion},
\]

where \(L_{rgb}\), \(L_{thermal}\) and \(L_{fusion}\) represent RGB loss, thermal loss and fusion loss, respectively.

4 EXPERIMENT

4.1 Datasets and Metrics

Our method is evaluated on three publicly available datasets using seven commonly employed metrics.

Datasets. We evaluate our proposed method on three publicly available RGB-T SOD datasets, including VT821 [32], VT1000 [30], and VT5000 [28]. Thermal images in VT821 pose specific challenges during manual registration by forming empty regions, which we address by adding noise to some of the visible images. In VT5000, the authors labeled 11 challenging scenes based on factors such as object size, lighting conditions, center bias, number of prominent objects, and background quality. Our model is trained using 2,500 different image pairs from VT5000, while the remaining image pairs, along with VT821 and VT1000, are utilized for testing.

Metrics. We adopt widely used metrics to evaluate the performance of our model and the SOTA RGB-T SOD model. They are precision-recall (PR) curve, the mean F-measure (F\text{avg}) [43], max F-measure (F\text{max}) [43], weighted F-measure (F\text{w}) [19], mean absolute error (MAE) [23], E-measure (\(E_m\)) [6], and S-measure (\(S_m\)) [5].

4.2 Implementation Details

The RGB and thermal input images are resized to a resolution of 384x384 pixels. During the training phase, we apply various strategies to augment all the training image pairs of RGB-thermal data augmentation. Our networks are trained using the SGD optimizer with a batch size of 8, an initial learning rate of 0.025, and a momentum of 0.9. The model is trained for 100 epochs with a learning rate decay of 5e-4. Both the training and testing of our model are conducted using PyTorch on an NVIDIA RTX 3090 GPU.

4.3 Ablation Studies

Asymmetric Backbone. As shown in Table 3, we compare the symmetric SwinTransformer based network, the symmetric Mobilevit based network and our proposed asymmetric ADNet. From the comparison results, we can see that our proposed asymmetric network performs well, with much higher performance than the symmetric Mobilevit network and even surpassing the structure of the symmetric Swin Transformer.

Feature Fusion. Table 4 demonstrates that both interaction and augmentation operations on features yield improvements, with the combined interaction and augmentation yielding the most favorable results. These findings validate the effectiveness of our proposed feature manipulation and highlight the crucial role played by information sharing between RGB and thermal modes in enhancing the effectiveness of saliency detection.

Model Complexity. In addition, we explore the complexity of the model, as shown in Table 5. We measure the complexity of the model by counting the number of parameters and the number of computations. According to the experimental results, the introduction of Mobilevit can effectively reduce the model complexity, and the feature interaction module and feature enhancement model do not introduce too many parameters and computations.

4.4 Comparison with State-of-the-Arts

To demonstrate the effectiveness of the proposed method, 14 state-of-the-art SOD methods are introduced to compare as follows: M3S-NIR [29], MTMR [32], SGDL [30], ADF [32], MIDD [26], CSRNet [10], OSRNet [11], TNet [2], MCFNet [17], CGFNet [33], CAVER [22], ACMANet [40], SwinNet [15], CMDBIF [39]. All models are trained on the VT5000 training set (2,500 images).
Table 2: Performance comparison with SOTA methods on VT5000, VT1000 and VT821, the best results are highlighted in Bold.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods</th>
<th>VT5000</th>
<th>VT1000</th>
<th>VT821</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$F_{avg}\uparrow$</td>
<td>$F_{max}\uparrow$</td>
<td>$F_{e}\uparrow$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MMS-NIR [29]</td>
<td>0.575</td>
<td>0.644</td>
<td>0.327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MTMIR [32]</td>
<td>0.595</td>
<td>0.662</td>
<td>0.397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SGGDL [30]</td>
<td>0.672</td>
<td>0.737</td>
<td>0.558</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADF [32]</td>
<td>0.778</td>
<td>0.863</td>
<td>0.722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIDD [26]</td>
<td>0.801</td>
<td>0.871</td>
<td>0.763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSRNet [10]</td>
<td>0.811</td>
<td>0.857</td>
<td>0.796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSRNet [11]</td>
<td>0.823</td>
<td>0.866</td>
<td>0.807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TNet [2]</td>
<td>0.846</td>
<td>0.895</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCFNet [17]</td>
<td>0.848</td>
<td>0.886</td>
<td>0.836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CGFNet [33]</td>
<td>0.851</td>
<td>0.887</td>
<td>0.831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAVER [22]</td>
<td>0.856</td>
<td>0.897</td>
<td>0.849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACMANet [40]</td>
<td>0.858</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SwinNet [15]</td>
<td>0.865</td>
<td>0.915</td>
<td>0.846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMDBIF [39]</td>
<td>0.868</td>
<td>0.892</td>
<td>0.846</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ours</td>
<td>0.893</td>
<td>0.924</td>
<td>0.884</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7: Visual comparison with SOTA RGB-T methods.

Qualitative Evaluation. The visualization results of our method are shown in Figure 7. The upper two rows are examples of poor performance of RGB images (blurry, dim or too small salient area), and the lower two rows are examples of poor performance of thermal images (indistinguishable from the background). It can be seen that our method can achieve better detection results in both cases and is more robust.

5 CONCLUSION

In this paper, we introduced ADNet, an asymmetric network designed for the RGBT-SOD task. An asymmetric dual-stream backbone was utilized to extract both RGB and thermal features. Additionally, the CSI module and SAE module were introduced to enhance cross-modal interactions. Experimental results demonstrated that our ADNet achieved excellent performance on public datasets, validating the effectiveness of our proposed asymmetric network. Moreover, our method used lower model parameters and computational costs.

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