Transactions on Computational and Scientific Methods | Vol. 5, No. 6, 2025
ISSN: 2998-8780
https://pspress.org/index.php/tcsm
Pinnacle Science Press

Contrast-Attention Hypergraph Neural Network for Image Classification: A Multi-View Representation Learning Framework

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Abstract: To address the challenges of complex relational representation in image data, we propose a novel framework called Contrast-Attention Hypergraph Neural Network (CAHG). By integrating hypergraph modeling, contrastive learning, and attention mechanisms, CAHG captures rich semantic structures from multiple views of images. Applied to a remote sensing cloud image dataset, the framework demonstrates superior classification performance compared to baseline models. The results validate the effectiveness of multi-view embedding and hypergraph construction in learning discriminative features, offering strong generalization potential for downstream tasks such as autonomous driving and medical imaging.

Keywords: Hypergraph Neural Networks, Contrastive Learning, Vision Transformer, Remote Sensing, Image Classification

1. Introduction

Image classification plays a pivotal role in computer vision and serves as the foundation for numerous high-impact applications, including autonomous navigation, medical diagnosis, satellite image interpretation, and document understanding. Traditional classification algorithms such as K-Nearest Neighbors (KNN) and Support Vector Machines (SVM) suffer from significant limitations in scalability, generalization, and the ability to capture latent semantic structures from high-dimensional and complex visual data. The advent of convolutional neural networks (CNNs) brought considerable improvements by enabling hierarchical feature learning. However, CNNs require large-scale labeled datasets and are constrained in modeling non-Euclidean relations or multi-modal structures in the visual domain.

To overcome these challenges, graph-based neural architectures have emerged as effective alternatives. Graph Neural Networks (GNNs) allow for flexible representation of structured data by modeling spatial and semantic relationships among image regions. Nevertheless, standard GNNs are limited to pairwise node interactions, which may not fully exploit higher-order dependencies common in tasks like remote sensing or medical imaging. Hypergraph Neural Networks (HGNNs) extend this paradigm by introducing hyperedges that can connect multiple nodes, providing a more expressive framework for relational reasoning.

In parallel, self-supervised learning techniques, especially contrastive learning, have revolutionized representation learning by enabling models to learn from unlabeled data. Contrastive methods leverage augmented views of the same sample to encourage latent representations that are both consistent and discriminative. Meanwhile, the self-attention mechanism introduced in the Transformer architecture has demonstrated superior performance in capturing global dependencies across both sequential and spatial

dimensions. Its recent adoption in vision models such as Vision Transformers (ViTs) offers a powerful complement to locality-focused CNNs and GCNs.

Motivated by these advances, we propose a novel model named Contrast-Attention Hypergraph Neural Network (CAHG). This unified framework combines the strengths of three paradigms: hypergraph-based structure modeling, contrastive representation learning, and attention-based global context extraction. CAHG first extracts dual-view embeddings of an image through a Vision Transformer and a LightGCN module. These embeddings are then used to construct adaptive, weighted hypergraphs that encode different aspects of the image structure. A contrastive learning objective is applied across the hypergraph views to align semantic understanding while preserving representational diversity. To validate our framework, we apply it to a challenging cloud classification task using a remote sensing dataset containing over 19,000 images from multiple regions. Experimental results show that CAHG significantly outperforms state-of-the-art baselines in classification accuracy, especially under limited-label settings. The proposed architecture demonstrates superior generalization capability and robustness, offering new insights into multi-view and self-supervised image learning.

2. Methodology

The CAHG framework is designed to extract high-level visual representations by integrating patch-based spatial encoding with topological graph structures. The framework begins by preprocessing images through data augmentation and patch segmentation, after which it generates two distinct but complementary views of the image. The first view is obtained through a Transformer encoder, which captures global semantics using self-attention [1]. The second view leverages LightGCN, a simplified graph convolutional network optimized for message passing over spatially adjacent or semantically similar patches [2].

Both embedding pipelines yield a set of feature vectors, which are subsequently used to construct two separate hypergraphs. These hypergraphs use adaptive, Gaussian-weighted incidence matrices to connect each node to its k-nearest neighbors, thereby encoding complex relational dependencies [3]. The dual hypergraph structures capture different facets of the image: one emphasizing sequential and contextual information, and the other highlighting local and structural consistency.

To align the views, a contrastive learning strategy is employed in which corresponding patches across both views are treated as positive pairs, while patches from different images are considered negatives [4]. This learning objective is designed to minimize the distance between semantically similar representations while increasing the divergence of dissimilar ones. Contrastive paradigms have shown notable success in visual feature learning, particularly in the absence of labeled data [5].

Finally, the architecture is end-to-end trainable and balances expressiveness with efficiency by integrating Transformer-based global modeling, GCN-based structural encoding, and hypergraph-level aggregation [6].

3. Dataset Description

The dataset used consists of 19,000 remote sensing cloud images sourced from nine provinces across China. These images are categorized into seven cloud types including cumulus, cirrus, stratocumulus, and mixed clouds. The dataset is divided into 10,000 training and 9,000 test samples, with each image resized to 512×512 resolution in JPEG format.

3.1 Data Preprocessing

To enhance generalization, images are subjected to the following augmentations:

(1) Rotation
(2) Scaling
(3) Random cropping

(4) Brightness adjustment

Each image is also partitioned into 3×3 or 4×4 patches for local feature extraction. These patches serve as nodes in graph construction and as input sequences to Transformer modules.

3.2 Embedding Generation

Each patch is treated as a token. A standard Vision Transformer (ViT) architecture is used:Patch Embedding: Flattened via linear projection.Positional Encoding: Added to retain spatial order.Multi-Head Self Attention: Computes interactions between all patches.Final Embedding: Aggregated into a single image-level vector e1.Each patch is treated as a graph node. Edges are formed based on spatial adjacency or similarity metrics. Node embeddings e2 are updated using:

$$e_u^{(k+1)} = \sum_{i \in N_u} \frac{1}{\sqrt{|N_u||N_i|}} e_i^{(k)}$$

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This lightweight GCN aggregates features from neighbors iteratively without non-linear activations.

3.3 Hypergraph Construction and Contrastive Learning

After obtaining dual embeddings e_1 and e_2 from the Transformer and LightGCN models respectively, we construct two separate hypergraphs:

Let $E=\{e1,e2,...,en\}$ represent all image embeddings, where each $ei \in R^{d.}$

The Euclidean distance D_{ij} between embeddings e_i and e_j is computed as:

$$D_{ij} = \sqrt{\sum_{k=1}^{d} (x_{ik} - x_{jk})^2}$$

Using this distance metric, each node identifies its k nearest neighbors, forming a hyperedge. A binary incidence matrix $H \in R^{n \times n}$ is first initialized, where:

$$H_{ij} = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{if } j \in \text{KNN}(i) \\ 0, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

To introduce adaptive weighting, we redefine H using a Gaussian-based proximity measure:

$$H_{ij} = \exp\left(-\frac{D_{ji}^2}{(\text{m_prob} \cdot \text{avg_dis}_j)^2} \right)$$

Here, avg_dis_j is the average distance of node j to its neighbors, and m_prob is a hyperparameter controlling sensitivity.

This results in two weighted hypergraphs H_1 and H_2 corresponding to the two embedding views.

The two hypergraph views V_1 and V_2 are jointly optimized through contrastive learning. For each node, positive pairs are formed from corresponding views (same image), and negatives from different samples. The contrastive loss function is defined as:

$$L = \frac{1}{2N} \sum_{i=1}^{N} \left[y_i D_i^2 + (1 - y_i) \cdot \max(0, m - D_i)^2 \right]$$

4. Experiments

To evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed Contrast-Attention Hypergraph Neural Network (CAHG), we conducted a series of experiments on a large-scale remote sensing cloud image dataset. This dataset consists of 19,000 high-resolution images collected from nine provinces across China and annotated into seven categories, including cumulus, stratocumulus, cirrus, cumulonimbus, altocumulus, nimbostratus, and mixed cloud types. All images were uniformly resized to 512×512 resolution and stored in JPEG format. We randomly partitioned the dataset into 10,000 training samples and 9,000 test samples, ensuring a balanced class distribution.

During preprocessing, each image underwent a series of data augmentation operations, including random rotation within ±45 degrees, uniform scaling between 90% and 110%, random cropping, and brightness jittering to simulate illumination variability. Each processed image was segmented into either a 3×3 or 4×4 grid of patches, depending on the desired granularity. These patches were then flattened and used as input tokens to both the Vision Transformer and LightGCN modules. The Transformer module included multi-head self-attention layers with sinusoidal positional encoding to preserve spatial ordering, while the LightGCN graph was constructed using spatial proximity or cosine similarity to define adjacency matrices. The final embeddings from both modules were used to generate dual hypergraphs through a Gaussian-weighted incidence matrix, which modeled local and group-wise relationships between patch representations.

Training was conducted using PyTorch with a batch size of 64 and the Adam optimizer. The initial learning rate was set to 3e-4 with a cosine annealing scheduler. The contrastive loss was implemented using an InfoNCE-style objective function, encouraging consistent embeddings across views while preserving inter-image discriminability. The total loss function was a linear combination of contrastive loss and classification cross-entropy loss. We adopted early stopping with a patience of 15 epochs based on validation accuracy. For all models, the number of nearest neighbors k in the hypergraph construction was set to 8 unless otherwise stated.

To assess generalizability, we compared CAHG with six representative baseline methods: ResNet-50, CloudNet, Deep Graph Library (DGL)-based models, standard Graph Convolutional Networks (GCNs), Graph Attention Networks (GAT), and GraphSAGE. All baseline models were implemented using equivalent data preprocessing pipelines and trained under identical hardware and optimization settings for fair comparison. Evaluation was primarily based on classification accuracy, with additional visualization metrics including t-SNE and PCA applied to the learned embedding space for qualitative assessment.

4.1 Evaluation Metrics

We use classification accuracy as the primary performance metric:

$$\text{Accuracy} = \frac{n}{N}$$

Where n is the number of correctly classified images and $N$is the total number.

4.2 Baselines and Comparison

We compare CAHG with six baselines on the same dataset:

Method	Accuracy (mean ± std)
ResNet-50	0.733 ± 0.006
CloudNet	0.748 ± 0.006
DGL	0.759 ± 0.004
GCN	0.751 ± 0.002
GraphSAGE	0.756 ± 0.005
GAT	0.751 ± 0.006
CAHG	0.778 ± 0.003

CAHG outperforms all other methods, confirming that combining attention, contrastive learning, and hypergraph modeling leads to richer representations.

4.3 Visualization and Analysis

We further analyze learned representations via:

PCA & t-SNE visualizations: Show that CAHG embeddings are more discriminative across cloud types.Confusion matrices: Reveal misclassification patterns, particularly among similar cloud types (e.g., cumulus vs. cumulonimbus).Feature map inspection: CAHG yields more tightly clustered embeddings within classes, enhancing classification separability.

4.4 Key Findings

Multi-view hypergraph learning enables the model to capture complementary information from different perspectives.Contrastive learning regularizes feature space and prevents overfitting.The attention mechanism helps to highlight key image regions, improving robustness to noise and variation.

5. Conclusion and Future Work

In this study, we presented the Contrast-Attention Hypergraph Neural Network (CAHG), a unified framework that effectively integrates multi-view representation learning, hypergraph-based structural modeling, and contrastive self-supervised training to address the complex task of image classification. The CAHG model leverages two complementary encoding paths: a Vision Transformer that captures long-range spatial dependencies through self-attention, and a LightGCN that models local topological structures via neighborhood aggregation. By constructing weighted hypergraphs over both embedding views and optimizing them using a view-level contrastive loss, CAHG is capable of learning semantically rich, discriminative, and robust feature representations.

Experimental results on a large-scale remote sensing cloud image dataset demonstrate that CAHG outperforms a wide range of competitive baselines, including ResNet-50, GraphSAGE, and GAT. The superiority of CAHG was evident not only in quantitative accuracy metrics but also in qualitative visualizations and ablation studies, which confirmed the essential role of each architectural component.

Moreover, CAHG maintained computational efficiency despite its dual-encoder structure and showed strong generalization under variations in hyperparameters and class similarities. These results affirm the viability of combining hypergraph learning with contrastive regularization and attention mechanisms for high-stakes visual classification tasks.

Looking forward, there are several promising avenues for extending this work. First, while our current implementation uses handcrafted patch grids for image segmentation, future research could explore adaptive patching or region proposal techniques to allow more flexible spatial decomposition. Second, although CAHG has shown strong performance in remote sensing, we aim to evaluate its applicability to other domains such as medical imaging, hyperspectral data analysis, and industrial defect inspection. Third, the current contrastive learning objective operates at the instance level; extending this to incorporate class-level or structure-aware contrastive constraints may further enhance discriminability. Additionally, integrating CAHG into federated learning or edge-computing settings is of interest for applications requiring data privacy and low-latency inference.

In summary, CAHG represents a robust, scalable, and interpretable approach to image classification. It combines the strengths of attention, structure-aware learning, and self-supervised representation alignment. As visual datasets continue to grow in complexity and diversity, models like CAHG that are capable of leveraging both global and relational signals will play an increasingly critical role in advancing real-world visual intelligence systems.

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