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**A Comparison of Classification Techniques for Monitoring and Mapping Land Cover  
and Land Use Changes in the Subtropical Region of Thai Nguyen, Vietnam**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of  
Environmental Management

at Massey University, Palmerston North  
New Zealand.

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2017

## **Abstract**

Deriving land cover/land-use information from earth observation satellite data is one of the most common applications for environmental monitoring, evaluation and management. Many parametric and non-parametric classification algorithms have been developed and applied to such applications. This study looks at the classification accuracies of three algorithms for different spatial and spectral resolution data. The performance of Random Forest (RF) was compared to Maximum Likelihood (MLC) and Artificial Neural Network (ANN) algorithms for the separation of subtropical land cover/land-use categories using Sentinel-2 and Landsat 8 data. The overall, producers' and users' accuracies were derived from the confusion matrix, while local land use statistics were also collected to evaluate the accuracy of classified images. The accuracy assessment showed the RF algorithm regularly outperformed the MLC and ANN in both types of imagery data (>90%). This approach also exhibited potential in dealing with the challenge of separating similar man-made features such as urban/built-up and mining extraction classes. The ANN algorithm had the lowest accuracy among the three classification algorithms, while Landsat 8 imagery was most suitable for the classification of subtropical mixed and complex landscapes.

As the RF algorithm demonstrated a robustness and potential for mapping subtropical land cover/land-use, this study chose it to monitor and map temporal land cover/land-use changes in Thai Nguyen, Vietnam between 2000 and 2016. The results of this temporal monitoring revealed that there were substantial changes in land cover/land use over the course of 16 years. Agricultural and forest land decreased, while urban and mining extraction land expanded significantly, and water increased slightly. Changes in land cover/land-use are strongly associated with geographic locations. The conversion of agriculture and forest into urban/built-up and mining extraction land was detected largely in the Thai Nguyen central city and southern

regions. In addition, further GIS analysis revealed that approximately 69.6% (100.2km<sup>2</sup>) of new built-up areas had occurred within 2km of primary roads, and nearly 96% (137.6km<sup>2</sup>) of new built-up expansion was detected within a 5-km buffer of the main roads. This study also demonstrates the potential of multi-temporal Landsat data and the combination of remote sensing, GIS and R programming to provide a timely, accurate and economical means to map and analyse temporal changes for long-term local land use development planning.

**Keywords:** Random forest; Land cover mapping; Remote Sensing; Vietnam

## **Acknowledgements**

I would first like to express my gratitude and sincere thanks to my supervisors, **Mike Tuohy** and **Matthew Irwin** at Institute of Agriculture and Environment, Massey University for their guidance, valuable advice, encouragement, and endless patience through the entire process of this thesis research. They always allowed me to work on my own idea, but steered me on the right direction whenever I needed assistance.

My special thanks also go to all lecturers for their enthusiastic lectures and encouragement during my first year at Massey University, and to my classmates for cheering me up and giving constructive advice. Special thanks also devote to all Vietnamese friends and scholars at Massey University for their continuous encouragement and support.

I would also like to thank my friends back home in Vietnam who involved in fieldtrip survey for this thesis research, particularly Mr. **Tuan**, Mr. **Hung** and Mr. **Hoang**. This research would not be complete without their enthusiasm and assistance.

I would also love to take this opportunity to thank New Zealand government for sponsoring my home data collection, and for the scholarship to pursue the Master's degree in Environmental Management at Massey University. Special thanks also dedicate to **Jamie**, **Dave**, **Logan** and all staff at International Student Support Office, Massey University for making sure that all scholars like me could obtain the best academic achievements and enjoyable life experience while in New Zealand.

Finally, I must express my very profound gratitude to my family for providing me with continuous support and love throughout my years of study.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

ROI: Region of Interest

DN: Digital Number

ETM+: Enhanced Thematic Mapper Plus

OLI/ TIR: Operational Land Imager/ Thermal Infrared

GIS: Geographic Information System

RS: Remote Sensing

MLC: Maximum Likelihood Classifier

ANN: Artificial Neural Network

RF: Random Forest

CART: Classification and Regression Tree

PCA: Principal Component Analysis

TOA: Top of Atmosphere

ENVI: Environment for Visualizing Images

NDVI: Normalized Differenced Vegetation Index

UTM: Universal Transverse Mercator

WGS84: World Geodetic System 84

NASA: National Aeronautics and Space Administration

USWGS: United States Geological Survey

VNIR: Visible/Near-infrared

SWIR: Shortwave Infrared

RGB: Red, Green and Blue

PCC: Post Classification Comparison

TNMT: Thai Nguyen Department of Natural Resource and Environment