

# FFA-Net: Feature Fusion Attention Network for Single Image Dehazing

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## Abstract

In this paper, we propose an end-to-end feature fusion attention network (FFA-Net) to directly restore the haze-free image. The FFA-Net architecture consists of three key components:

1) A novel Feature Attention (FA) module combines Channel Attention with Pixel Attention mechanism, considering that different channel-wise features contain totally different weighted information and haze distribution is uneven on the different image pixels. FA treats different features and pixels unequally, which provides additional flexibility in dealing with different types of information, expanding the representational ability of CNNs. 2) A basic block structure consists of Local Residual Learning and Feature Attention, Local Residual Learning allowing the less important information such as thin haze region or low-frequency to be bypassed through multiple local residual connections, let main network architecture focus on more effective information. 3) An Attention-based different levels Feature Fusion (FFA) structure, the feature weights are adaptively learned from the Feature Attention (FA) module, giving more weight to important features. This structure can also retain the information of shallow layers and pass it into deep layers.

The experimental results demonstrate that our proposed FFA-Net surpasses previous state-of-the-art single image dehazing methods by a very large margin both quantitatively and qualitatively, boosting the best published PSNR metric from 30.23 dB to 36.39 dB on the SOTS indoor test dataset. Code has been made available at GitHub.

## Introduction

Single image dehazing as a fundamental low-level vision task, has attracted increasing attention in the computer vision community and artificial intelligence companies over the past few decades.

Due to the existence of smoke, dust, fumes, mist and other floating particles in the atmosphere, images taken in such atmosphere are often subject to color distortion, blurring, low contrast and other visible quality degradation, and the hazy

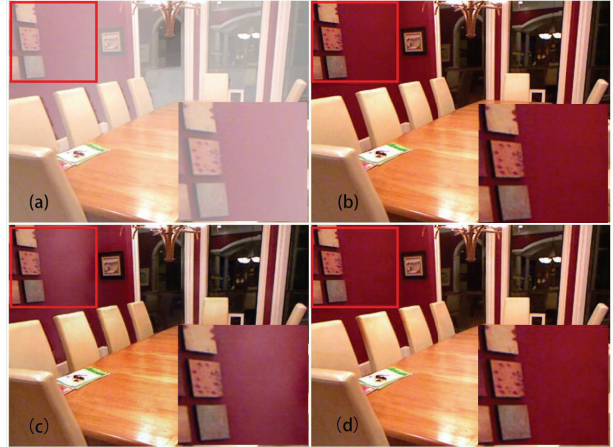


Figure 1: An example of image dehazing. (a) Input hazy image. (b) Ground Truth. (c) Result of GCANet. (d) Our result. Our FFA-Net outperforms GCANet in image detail and color fidelity.

image input will make it difficult to solve the other visual tasks such as classification, tracking, person re-identification and object detection. In view of this, image dehazing aims to recover the clean image from the corrupted input, this will be the preprocessing step of the high-level vision tasks. The atmosphere scattering model (Cartney 1976)(Narasimhan and Nayar 2000)(Narasimhan and Nayar 2002) provides a simple approximation of the haze effect, it is formulated as:

$$I(z) = J(z)t(z) + A(1 - t(z)) \quad (1)$$

Where  $I(z)$  is the observed hazy image,  $A$  is the global atmosphere light, and  $t(z)$  is the medium transmission map,  $J(z)$  is the haze-free image. Moreover, we have  $t(z) = e^{-\beta d(z)}$  with  $\beta$  and  $d(z)$  being the atmosphere scattering parameter and the scene depth, respectively. The atmosphere scattering model shows that image dehazing is an under-determined problem without the knowledge of  $A$  and  $t(z)$ . Formulation (1) can also be formulated as:

$$J(z) = \frac{(I(z) - A)}{t(z)} + A \quad (2)$$

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From the formulation 1 and 2, we can notice that if we estimate the global atmosphere and transmission map properly for a captured hazy image, we can restore a clear haze-free image.

Based on the atmosphere scattering model, early dehazing methods did a series of works(Berman, Avidan, and others 2016)(Fattal 2014)(He, Sun, and Tang 2010)(Jiang et al. 2017)(Ju, Gu, and Zhang 2017)(Meng et al. 2013)(Zhu, Mai, and Shao 2015). DCP is one of the outstanding prior-based methods, they propose the dark channel prior based on the assumption that image patches of outdoor haze-free images often have low-intensity values in at least one channel. However, the prior-based methods may lead to an inaccurate estimation of transmission map because of the prior may be easily violated in practice, so the prior-based methods may not work well in certain real cases.

With the rising-up of deep learning, many neural network approaches have also been proposed to estimate the haze effect, including the pioneering work of DehazeNet(Cai et al. 2016), the multi-scale CNN(MSCNN)(Ren et al. 2016), the residual learning technique(He et al. 2016), the quad-tree CNN(Kim, Ha, and Kwon 2018), and the densely connected pyramid dehazing network(Zhang and Patel 2018). Compared to traditional methods, deep learning methods try to directly regress the intermediate transmission map or the final haze-free image. With the big data being applied, they achieve superior performance with robustness.

In this paper, we propose a novel end-to-end feature fusion network(denoted as “FFA-Net”) for single image dehazing.

Previous CNN-based image dehazing networks treat the channel-wise and pixel-wise feature equally, but haze is unevenly distributed across an image, the weight of the very thin haze should be significantly different from that of the thick haze region pixels. Furthermore, DCP also finds that it is very common that some pixels have very low intensity in at least one color(RGB) channel, this further illustrates that different channel features have totally different weighted information. If we treat it equally, it will spend plenty of resources on unnecessary computations for less important information, the network will lack the ability to cover all the pixels and channels. Finally, it will greatly limit the representation of the network.

Since the attention mechanism(Xu et al. 2015)(Vaswani et al. 2017)(Wang et al. 2018) has been widely used in the design of neural networks, it has played an important role in the performance of networks. Inspired by the work (Zhang et al. 2018), we further design a novel feature attention (FA) module. The FA module combines the channel attention and pixel attention in channel-wise and pixel-wise features, respectively. FA treats different features and pixels unequally, which can provide additional flexibility in dealing with different types of information.

The emergence of ResNet(He et al. 2016) has made it possible to train a very deep network. We adopt the idea of skip connection and the attention mechanism and design a basic block consisting of multiple local residual learning skip connections and feature attention. For one thing, the local residual learning allows the information of the thin haze region

and low-frequency information to be bypassed through multiple local residual learning, making the main network learn more useful information. And channel attention further improves the capability of FFA-Net.

As the network goes deeper and deeper, shallow feature information is often difficult to preserve. In order to identify and fuse different level features, U-Net(Ronneberger, Fischer, and Brox 2015) and other networks strive to integrate the shallow and deep information. Similarly, we propose an attention-based feature fusion structure (FFA), this structure can retain shallow information and pass it into deep layers. Most importantly, the FFA-Net gives different weights to different level features before feeding all features to feature fusion module, the weight is obtained by adaptive learning of the FA module. It is much better than those that directly specified the weight.

To evaluate the performance of different image dehazing networks, peak-signal-to-noise-ratio (PSNR) and structure similarity index (SSIM) are commonly used to quantify dehazed image restoration quality. For human subjective assessment, we also provide plenty of network outputs from corrupted inputs. We validate the effectiveness of the FFA-Net on the widely used dehazing benchmark dataset RESIDE(Li et al. 2018). Compared the PSNR and SSIM metrics with previous state-of-the-art methods. Experiments demonstrate that FFA-Net surpasses all the previous methods both qualitatively and quantitatively by a very large margin. Moreover, we conduct many ablation experiments to prove that our key components of FFA-Net have an excellent performance.

Overall, our contributions are four-folds as below:

- We propose a novel end-to-end feature fusion attention network FFA-Net for single image dehazing. FFA-Net surpasses previous state-of-the-art image dehazing methods by a very large margin, the FFA-Net performs especially outstanding in region with thick haze and rich texture details. We also have a powerful advantage in the restoration of image detail and color fidelity, as seen in Fig.1 and Fig.8.
- We propose a novel feature attention (FA) module, which combines the channel attention and pixel attention mechanism. This module provides additional flexibility in dealing with different types of information, focusing more attention on the thick haze pixels and more important channel information.
- We propose a basic block consisting of local residual learning and feature attention (FA), local residual learning allows the information of the thin haze region and low-frequency information to be bypassed through multiple skip connections, feature attention (FA) further improves the capacity of FFA-Net.
- We propose an attention-based feature fusion (FFA) structure, this structure can retain shallow layers’ information and pass it into deep layers. Besides, it can not only fuse all features but also adaptively learn the different weights of different level feature information. Finally, it achieves a much better performance than other feature fusion methods.

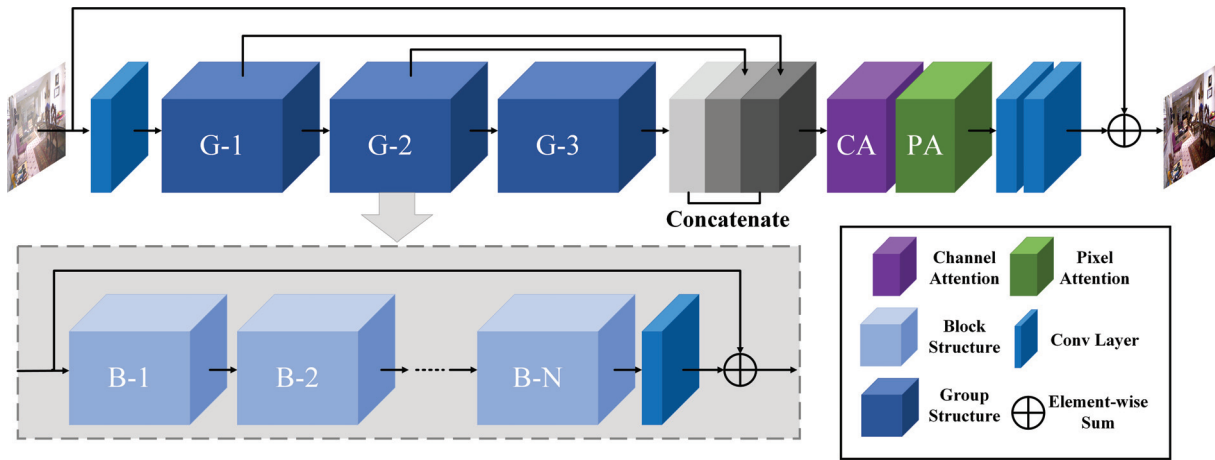


Figure 2: The feature fusion attention network (FFA-Net) architecture.

## Related Work

Previously, most of the existing image dehazing methods depend on the formulation of physical scattering model equation1, which is a highly ill-posed problem because of the unknown transmission map and global atmospheric light. These methods can be roughly divided into two classes: traditional prior-based methods and modern learning-based methods. No matter which method is used, the key is to solve the transmission map and the atmosphere light. For traditional methods, based on the different image statistics prior, they leverage it as extra constraints to compensate for the information loss during the corruption procedure.

DCP(He, Sun, and Tang 2010) proposed a dark channel prior for the estimation of the transmission map. However, the priors are found to be unreliable when the scene objects are similar to the atmospheric light. (Zhu, Mai, and Shao 2015) propose a simple but powerful color attenuation prior by creating a linear model for modeling the scene depth of the hazy image. (Fattal 2008) present a new method for estimating the optical transmission in hazy scenes, the scattered light is eliminated to increase scene visibility and recover haze-free scene contrasts., (Berman, Avidan, and others 2016) proposed a non-local prior to characterize the clean image, the algorithm relies on the assumption that colors of a haze-free image are well approximated by a few hundred distinct colors, which forms tight clusters in RGB space. Although these methods have made a series of success, the prior is not robust to handle all the cases, such as the unconstrained environment in the wild.

In view of the prevailing success of deep learning in image processing tasks and the availability of large image datasets, (Cai et al. 2016) proposed an end-to-end dehazing model based on convolution neural network DehazeNet, it takes a hazy image as input, and outputs its medium transmission map, which is subsequently used to recover a haze-free image via atmospheric scattering model. (Ren et al. 2016) employed a Multi-Scale MSCNN that is able to perform a refined transmission map from the hazy image. (Yang

and Sun 2018) combines the advantages of traditional prior-based dehazing methods and deep learning methods by incorporating haze-related prior learning into deep network.. (Li et al. 2017) AOD-Net directly generates a clean image through a light-weight CNN. Such a novel end-to-end design makes it easy to embed AOD-Net into other deep models. The gated fusion network(GFN) (Ren et al. 2018) leverages hand-selected pre processing methods and multi-scale estimation, which are generic in nature and are subject to improvement. (Chen et al. 2019) proposed an end-to-end gated context aggregation network to directly restore the final haze-free image, which adopted the latest smoothed dilation technique to help remove the gridding artifacts caused by the widely used dilated convolution with negligible extra parameters. EPDN (Qu et al. 2019) is embedded by a generative adversarial network, which is followed by a well-designed enhancer without relying on the physical scattering model.

## Fusion Feature Attention Network (FFA-Net)

In this section, we mainly introduce our feature fusion attention network FFA-Net. As shown in Fig.2, the input of FFA-Net is a hazy image, it is passed into a shallow feature extraction part, then is fed into N Group Architectures with multiple skip connections, the output features of N Group Architectures are fused together through our proposed Feature Attention module, after that, the features will be finally passed to the reconstruction part and global residual learning structure, thereby getting a haze-free output.

Furthermore, every Group Architecture combines B Basic Blocks Architecture with local residual learning, every Basic Block combines the skip connection and Feature Attention (FA) module. FA is an attention mechanism structure consisting of Channel-wise Attention and Pixel-wise Attention.

### Feature Attention (FA)

Most image dehazing networks treat the channel-wise and pixel-wise features equally, which can not handle the image



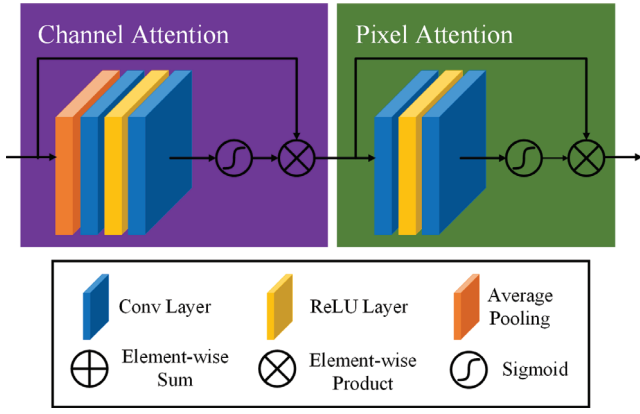


Figure 3: Feature Attention module

with uneven haze distribution and weighted channel-wise feature properly. Our Feature Attention (see Fig.3) consists of channel attention and pixel attention, which can provide additional flexibility in dealing with different types of information.

FA treats different features and pixels region unequally, which can provide additional flexibility in dealing with different types of information, and can expand the representational ability of CNNs. The crucial step is how to generate different weights for each channel-wise and pixel-wise feature. Our solution is below.

**Channel Attention (CA)** Our channel attention mainly concerns that different channel features have totally different weighted information with regards to DCP(He, Sun, and Tang 2010). Firstly, we take the channel-wise global spatial information into a channel descriptor by using global average pooling.

$$g_c = H_p(F_c) = \frac{1}{H \times W} \sum_{i=1}^H \sum_{j=1}^W X_c(i, j) \quad (3)$$

Where  $X_c(i, j)$  stands for the value of  $c$ -th channel  $X_c$  at position  $(i, j)$ ,  $H_p$  is the global pooling function. The shape of the feature map changes from  $C \times H \times W$  to  $C \times 1 \times 1$ . To get the weights of the different channels, features pass through two convolution layers and sigmoid, ReLU activation function latter.

$$CA_c = \sigma(\text{Conv}(\delta(\text{Conv}(g_c)))) \quad (4)$$

Where the  $\sigma$  is the sigmoid function,  $\delta$  is the ReLU function.

Finally, we element-wise multiply the input  $F_c$  and the weights of the channel  $CA_c$ .

$$F_c^* = CA_c \otimes F_c \quad (5)$$

**Pixel Attention (PA)** Considering that the haze distribution is uneven on the different image pixels, we propose a pixel attention (PA) module to make the network pay more attention to informative features, such as thick-hazed pixels and high-frequency image region.

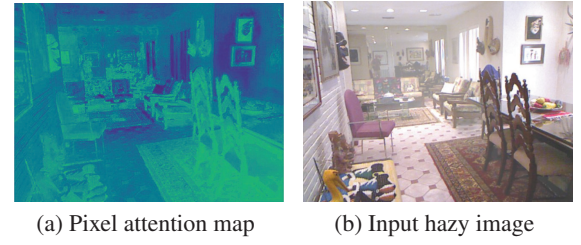


Figure 4: PA attention map

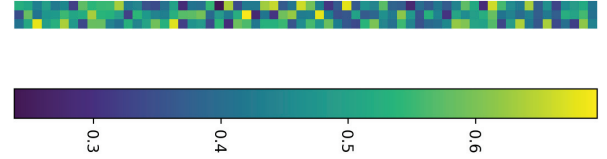


Figure 5: Channel Attention weight map

Similar to CA, We directly feed the input  $F^*$  (the output of the CA) into two convolution layers with ReLU and sigmoid activation function. The shape changes from  $C \times H \times W$  to  $1 \times H \times W$ .

$$PA = \sigma(\text{Conv}(\delta(\text{Conv}(F^*)))) \quad (6)$$

Finally we utilize element-wise multiplication for input  $F^*$  and  $PA$ ,  $\tilde{F}$  is the output of the Future Attention (FA) module.

$$\tilde{F} = F^* \otimes PA \quad (7)$$

To visually illustrate the effectiveness of the feature attention (FA) mechanism, we print the channel-wise and pixel-wise feature weights map of the Group Structure output. We can clearly see that different feature maps are adaptively learned with different weights. Fig.4 shows that thick hazy image pixel region and the edges, textures of objects having a larger weight. Pixel Attention (PA) mechanism makes the FFA-Net focus more attention on high frequency and thick-hazed pixels region. Fig.5 shows a  $3 \times 64$  sized graph, and three rows correspond to the feature map weights of the three Group Architectures output in the channel direction, illustration shows that different features adaptively learn completely different weights.

## Basic Block Structure

As is shown in Fig.6, a basic block structure consists of local residual learning and feature attention (FA) module, local residual learning allows the less important information such as thin haze or low-frequency region to be bypassed through multiple local residual connection, and main network focus on effective information.

Experiment results show that its structure can further improve network performance and training stabilization, the effect of local residual learning can be seen in Fig.7, specific details can be seen in the ablation study section

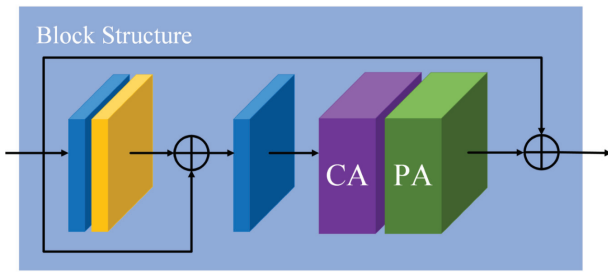


Figure 6: Basic Block Structure

## Group Architecture and Global Residual Learning

Our Group Architecture combines  $B$  Basic Block structures with skip connections module. Continuous  $B$  blocks increase the depth and expressiveness of the FFA-Net. And skip connections make FFA-Net get around training difficulty. At the end of the FFA-Net, we add a recovery part using a two-layer convolutional network implementation and a long shortcut global residual learning module. Finally, we restore our desired haze-free image.

## Feature Fusion Attention

As discussed above, firstly we concatenate all feature maps output by  $G$  Group Architectures in the channel direction. Furthermore, We fuse features by multiplying the adaptive learning weights which are obtained by Feature Attention (FA) mechanism. From this, we can retain the low-level information and pass it into deep layers, we let FFA-Net pay more attention to effective information such as thick haze region, high-frequency texture and color fidelity because of the weight mechanism.

## Loss Function

Mean squared error (MSE) or L2 loss is the most widely used loss function for single image dehazing. However (Lim et al. 2017) pointed out that many image restoration tasks training with L1 loss achieved a better performance than L2 loss in terms of PSNR and SSIM metrics. Following the same strategy, we adopt the simple L1 loss by default. Although many dehazing algorithms also use the perceptual loss and GAN loss, we choose to optimize the L1 loss.

$$L(\Theta) = \frac{1}{N} \sum_{i=1}^N \|I_{gt}^i - FFA(I_{haze}^i)\| \quad (8)$$

Where  $\Theta$  denotes the parameters of FFA-Net,  $I_{gt}$  stands for ground truth, and  $I_{haze}$  stands for input.

## Implementation Details

In this section, we specify the implementation details of our proposed FFA-Net. The number of Group Structure  $G$  is 3. In each Group Structure, we set the Basic Block Structure number as  $B = 19$ . Except for the Channel Attention whose kernel size is  $1 \times 1$ , we set all convolution layers' filter size is  $3 \times 3$ . All feature maps keep size fixed except for Channel Attention module. Every Group Structure outputs 64 filters.

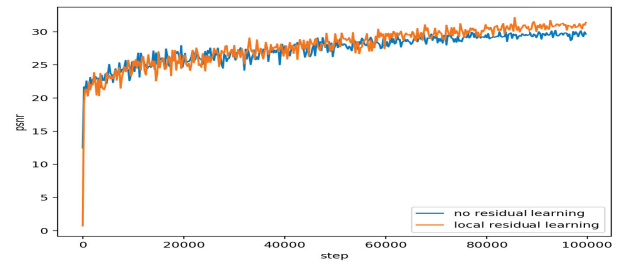


Figure 7: The effect of local residual learning

## Experiments

### Datasets and Metrics

(Li et al. 2018) proposed an image dehazing benchmark RESIDE, which contains synthetic hazy images in both indoor and outdoor scenarios from depth dataset (NYU Depth V2(Silberman et al. 2012)) and stereo datasets(Middlebury Stereo datasets (Scharstein and Szeliski 2003)). The Indoor Training Set of RESIDE contains 1399 clean image and 13990 hazy images generated by corresponding clean images. The global atmosphere light ranges from 0.8 to 1.0, the scatter parameters change from 0.04 to 0.2. To compare with previous state-of-the-art methods, we adopt PSNR and SSIM metrics and comprehensive comparisons testing in Synthetic Objective Testing Set (SOTS), which contains 500 indoor images and 500 outdoors ones. We also test the results on Realistic Hazy Images for subjective assessment.

### Training Settings

We train the FFA-Net in RGB channels and augment the training dataset with randomly rotated by  $90, 180, 270$  degrees and horizontal flip. The 2 hazy-image patches with the size  $240 \times 240$  are extracted as FFA-Net's input. The whole network is trained for  $5 \times 10^5$  steps. We use Adam optimizer, where  $\beta_1$  and  $\beta_2$  take the default values of 0.9 and 0.999, respectively.

The initial learning rate is set to  $1 \times 10^{-4}$ , we adopt the cosine annealing strategy (He et al. 2019) to adjust the learning rate from the initial value to 0 by following the cosine function. Assume the total number of batches is  $T$ ,  $\eta$  is the initial learning rate, then at batch  $t$ , the learning rate  $\eta_t$  is computed as:

$$\eta_t = \frac{1}{2} (1 + \cos(\frac{t\pi}{T})) \eta \quad (9)$$

PyTorch (Paszke et al. 2017) was used to implement our models with a RTX 2080Ti GPU.

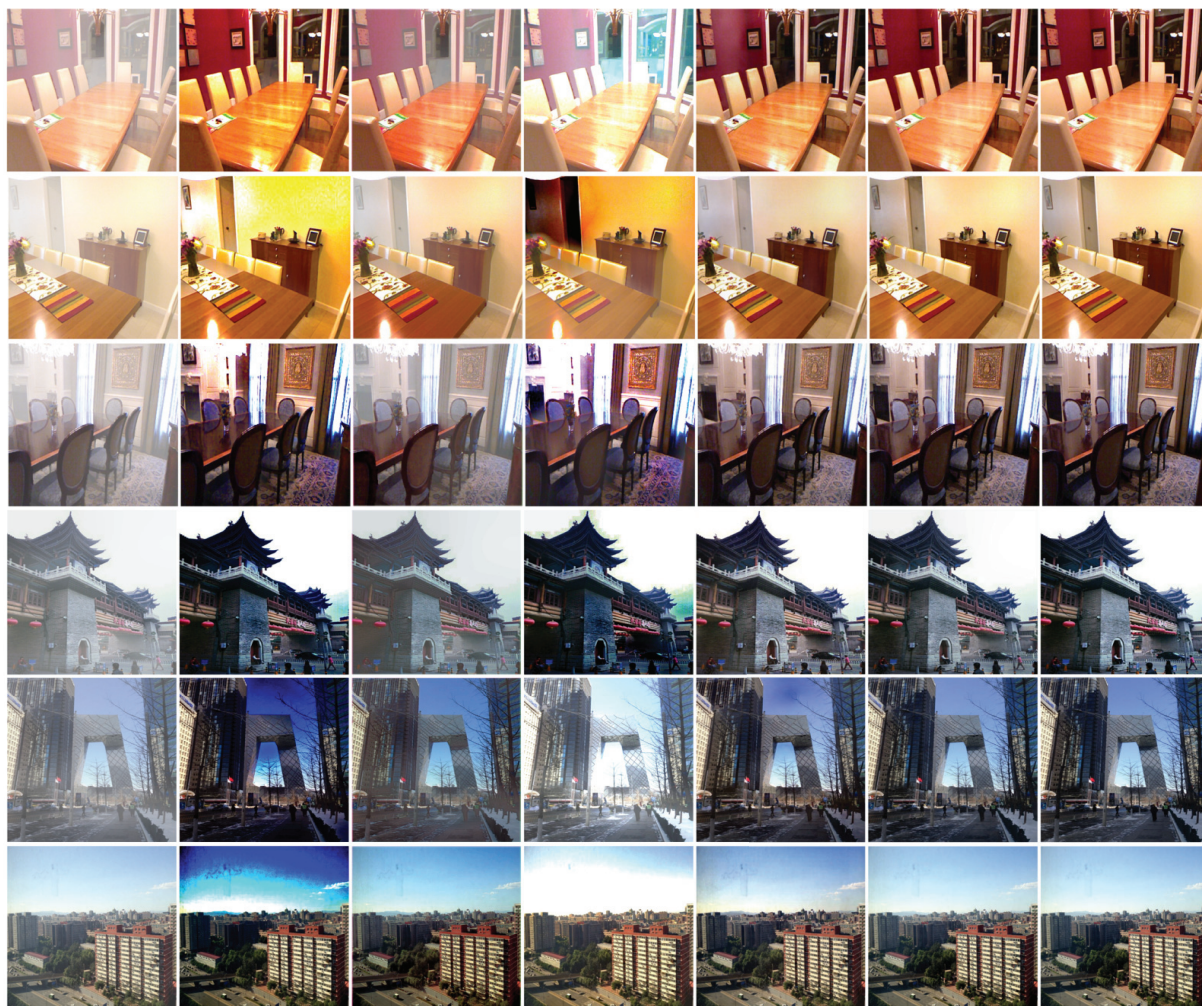
### Results on RESIDE Dataset

In this section, we will compare FFA-Net with previous state-of-the-art image dehazing algorithms both quantitatively and qualitatively.

We compared with four different state-of-the-art dehazing algorithms which are the DCP, AOD-Net, DehazeNet, GCANet. The comparison results are shown in Table 1.

For convenience, the metrics are cited from (Li et al. 2018) and (Qu et al. 2019). It can be seen that our proposed FFA-Net outperforms all four different state-of-the-





(a) Hazy inputs (b)DCP (c)AOD-Net (d)DehazeNet (e)GCANet (f)Ours (g) GT

(a) Indoor and outdoor results



(a)Hazy inputs (b)DCP (c)AOD-Net (d)DehazeNet (e)GCANet (f)Ours

(b) Real hazy image results

Figure 8: Qualitative comparisons on SOTS and Realistic Hazy Images testset

Methods	Indoor		Outdoor	
	PSNR	SSIM	PSNR	SSIM
DCP	16.62	0.8179	19.13	0.8148
AOD-Net	19.06	0.8504	20.29	0.8765
DehazeNet	21.14	0.8472	22.46	0.8514
GFN	22.30	0.8800	21.55	0.8444
GCArNet	30.23	0.9800	-	-
<b>Ours</b>	<b>36.39</b>	<b>0.9886</b>	<b>33.38</b>	<b>0.9804</b>

Table 1: Quantitative comparisons on SOTS for different methods.

art methods by a very large margin in terms of PSNR and SSIM. Moreover, we give the comparison of the visual effect in Fig.8 for qualitative comparisons.

From the indoor and outdoor results, three upper rows are indoor results, and outdoor results are shown in the bottom three rows. we can observe that DCP suffers from severe color distortion because of their underlying prior assumptions, consequently, it loses the details in the depth of image. AOD-Net can not remove the haze completely and tends to output low-brightness images. In contrast, Dehazenet recovers images with excessive brightness relative to ground truth. The processing power of GCANet at high-frequency detail information performance such as textures, edges and the blue sky in row 5 is always unsatisfactory.

For real hazy image results, our network can magically discover the towers that are looming in the depths of the image in row 1. More importantly, the results of our network are almost entirely in line with real scene information, such as the wet road with texture and raindrops in row 2. However, it is found that there are nonexistent spots on the building surface of the GCANet result in row 2. The images recovered from other networks are not satisfactory. Our network is clearly superior in the realistic performance of image details and color fidelity.

### Ablation Analysis

To further demonstrate the superiority of FFA-Net architecture, we conduct an ablation study by considering the different modules of our proposed FFA-Net. We mainly concern these factors: 1) The FA (Feature Attention) module. 2) The combination of local residual learning (LRL) and FA. 3) The Feature Fusion Attention (FFA) structure. We crop the image to  $48 \times 48$  as input with training of  $3 \times 10^5$  steps, other configuration is the same as our implementation details. The results are shown in Table 2.

FA	✓	✓	✓
LRL		✓	✓
FFA			✓
PSNR	30.28db	31.16db	32.44db

Table 2: Comparisons on SOTS indoor testset for different configurations.

And If we fully use the implementation details in our paper, then PSNR will achieve 35.77db. The results show that every factor we consider plays an important role in the network performance, especially the FFA structure. We can also clearly see that even if we only use the FA structure, our network can be very competitive compared with previous state-of-the-art methods. LRL makes network training stable while improving the network performance. The combination of the FA mechanism and feature fusion (FFA) has brought our results to a very high level.

### Conclusion

In this paper, we propose an end-to-end Feature Fusion Attention Network and demonstrated its strong power in single image dehazing. Although Our FFA-Net structure is simple, it is better than the previous state-of-the-art methods with a very large margin. Our network has a powerful advantage in the restoration of image detail and color fidelity, it is expected to solve other low-level vision tasks such as deraining, super-resolution, denoising. FFA and other effective modules in our FFA-Net play an important role in the image restoration algorithms.

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