

# Individual Stable Space: An Approach to Face Recognition Under Uncontrolled Conditions

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## Abstract

There usually exist many kinds of variations in face images taken under uncontrolled conditions, such as changes of pose, illumination, expression, etc. Most previous works on face recognition focus on particular variations and usually assume the absence of others. Instead of such a ‘divide and conquer’ strategy, this paper attempts to directly address *face recognition under uncontrolled conditions*. The key is the Individual Stable Space (ISS) which only expresses personal characteristics. A neural network named ISNN is proposed to map a raw face image into the ISS. After that, three ISS-based algorithms are designed for face recognition under uncontrolled conditions. There are no restrictions for the images fed into these algorithms. Moreover, unlike many other face recognition techniques, they do not require any extra training information, such as the view angle. These advantages make them practical to implement under uncontrolled conditions. The proposed algorithms are tested on three large face databases with vast variations and achieve superior performance compared with other 12 existing face recognition techniques.

## Index Terms

Face recognition, Pattern recognition, Machine learning, Neural networks, Individual stable space.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

During recent years, Face Recognition (FR) techniques have been making steps toward practicality. A number of FR systems achieved good performance in the latest report of Face Recognition Vendor Test (FRVT 2006) [4] yet many issues still remain to be addressed. Among those issues, perhaps the most prominent one is that most systems require the face images fed to them to satisfy certain ‘rules’, such as within a particular range of view angle, under homogeneous illumination, or without any occlusions. Such systems are called *Face Recognition under Controlled conditions (FRC)*. In fact, these rules greatly restrict the commercialization of the FR techniques because most real applications cannot satisfy such strict rules. What the real world needs are systems that can recognize any face images recognizable by human beings. Such systems are called *Face Recognition under Uncontrolled conditions (FRU)*. A formal definition is given as follows.

**Definition 1.** *Face Recognition under Uncontrolled conditions (FRU):* Given still or video face images with arbitrary variation but enough information to be recognized by human beings, identify or verify one or more persons, whose features have been stored in a database, without using any information other than the images themselves.

While a wide range of applications are covered by this definition, this paper focuses on scenarios including: identification, still image, and one person per image. Further work could extend to other cases like video sequences, verification, and multiple persons per image.

The development of FR techniques corresponds to a march from strictly controlled conditions to more and more uncontrolled conditions. Most early algorithms [2] [3] [21] [33] can handle expression variation well but suffer in the presence of other variations. Subsequently, many methods [9] [10] [13] [14] [16] [17] [18] [19] [20] [26] [29] were proposed to tackle view angle and illumination variations. Recently, a few works have been emerging to remove occlusion [34] and simulate aging effects [7]. Although the treatable variations are more and more complex,

most of these ingenious methods yet have to assume the absence of other possible variations. The methodology adopted by the existing work appears to be ‘divide and conquer’, i.e., gradually reduce the restrictions through tackling possible variations one by one. However, in practice, a number of variations are often complicatedly interlaced and cannot actually be divided. Thus the combination of several algorithms each of which handles a particular variation well will not necessarily result in a robust system against all variations. Instead of ‘divide and conquer’, this paper presents one of the first attempts directly targeting to FRU. Since the variations under uncontrolled conditions might be too complex to be well handled, we avoid explicitly modeling them. Instead, we focus on the information useful for recognition and try to filter out all other information. This is achieved by projecting the face images into a subspace called Individual Stable Space (ISS), where only the useful information is reserved.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. In section II, the four different kinds of information in the face images are analyzed and the concept of ISS is introduced. In section III, a neural network named ISNN is proposed to map a face image into the ISS. In section IV, three ISS-based algorithms for FRU are proposed. In section V, the experimental results are reported. Finally in section VI, conclusions are drawn and several issues for future work are indicated.

## II. EXTRACTION OF PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

To find a solution for FRU, we start from analyzing the components of the face images obtained under uncontrolled conditions. The information conveyed by an arbitrary face image<sup>1</sup> might be categorized into four kinds:

- 1) *Personal characteristics* (denoted by  $\Phi_{personal}$ ), i.e. the characteristics that make one person look different from others;
- 2) *Common facial characteristics* (denoted by  $\Phi_{facial}$ ), i.e. the characteristics shared by all faces;
- 3) *Face status* (denoted by  $\Phi_{status}$ ), i.e. any changes a particular face may undergo, such as expressions, aging effects, glasses, scars, etc.;
- 4) *Imaging configuration* (denoted by  $\Phi_{imaging}$ ), i.e. the conditions under which the face is imaged, such as illumination, view angle, imaging device, etc.

<sup>1</sup>Here the face image refers to the normalized face image, i.e. only the face region is contained in the image.

Information here refers to the semantic meanings, rather than the data in the image space or any subspace. Each kind of information has a certain number (up to infinite) of states (continuous or discrete values). Consequently the information conveyed by the image is the combination of the states of  $\Phi_{personal}$ ,  $\Phi_{facial}$ ,  $\Phi_{status}$ , and  $\Phi_{imaging}$ , and each kind of information can be extracted from the image. Although face images are believed to distribute on nonlinear manifolds [28], linear methods have been successfully used to extract various facial information [33] [3] [9]. Fig. 1 shows an example of using linear subspaces to extract  $\Phi_{personal}$ ,  $\Phi_{facial}$ ,  $\Phi_{status}$ , and  $\Phi_{imaging}$ , respectively. The data used in this example is a subset of the CMU PIE database [30]. As illustrated by Fig. 1(a), there are three states (1, 2, 3) for each of  $\Phi_{personal}$  (identity),  $\Phi_{status}$  (expression) and  $\Phi_{imaging}$  (illumination) in the data set. Note that in order to show what each variation might look like, each line of Fig. 1(a) only shows one variation, but in fact, the three kinds of variations might happen simultaneously in one face image, just as in real applications. The face images are first projected into the linear subspace spanned by the ‘eigenfaces’ [33]. Fig. 1(b) shows the first 10 eigenfaces. As can be seen, all the eigenfaces look like faces. Thus the subspace spanned by them is called ‘face space’ [33]. As the name implies, projection into the face space can be viewed as extraction of  $\Phi_{facial}$ . This is also evidenced by the numerous applications of coding/decoding face images with eigenfaces. The projections on the first two eigenfaces are plotted with respect to  $\Phi_{personal}$ ,  $\Phi_{status}$  and  $\Phi_{imaging}$  in sub-figures (c), (d) and (e), respectively. In each case, the three states cannot be well separated. Then Linear Discriminant Analysis (LDA) is used to find a linear subspace for each kind of information that can best separate the three states. The results are shown in sub-figures (f), (g) and (h), respectively. As can be seen, in each LDA subspace, the three states can be clearly separated, which means that different kinds of information contained in the images are decomposed by the linear subspaces. Of course, this is a simplified illustrative example in sense that only one variation in each of  $\Phi_{personal}$ ,  $\Phi_{status}$  and  $\Phi_{imaging}$ , while in real cases, the variations are much more complex. Among the four kinds of information,  $\Phi_{personal}$  is the only useful one for recognizing identity. Thus the key step of any face recognition method is the extraction of  $\Phi_{personal}$ , explicitly or implicitly. The problem is that in practice, the three other kinds of information are usually complicatedly interlaced and could not be clearly separated as shown in Fig. 1. In most cases, even the states of the information (class labels used in LDA) are not available.

Consider a set of face images obtained under uncontrolled conditions. The four kinds of information can be divided into two groups: *unstable* and *stable*, which are defined as the information with major and minor variance in the set respectively. Note that the stable information is not defined as with zero variance because of noise and the imperfection of algorithms. The membership of each group depends on the arrangement of the image set. For example, if the face images come from different persons, then  $\Phi_{personal}$ ,  $\Phi_{status}$  and  $\Phi_{imaging}$  are unstable, and only  $\Phi_{facial}$  is stable. If the face images all belong to the same person, then  $\Phi_{status}$  and  $\Phi_{imaging}$  are unstable while  $\Phi_{personal}$  and  $\Phi_{facial}$  are stable.

Most existing FR approaches focus on the unstable information in a set of face images from different persons. In this case,  $\Phi_{facial}$  is out of consideration first. The goal is set as distinguishing the variation of  $\Phi_{personal}$  from that of  $\Phi_{status}$  and  $\Phi_{imaging}$ . Of course the most straightforward way is to artificially freeze the states of  $\Phi_{status}$  and  $\Phi_{imaging}$ . But that will result in a trivial system which can only ‘recognize’ exactly the same face images in the database. Nontrivial work naturally starts from the relatively easier case when the variations of  $\Phi_{status}$  and  $\Phi_{imaging}$  are partially restricted, i.e., the case of FRC. Directly targeting FRU is challenging because the numerous variations of  $\Phi_{status}$  and  $\Phi_{imaging}$  might be too complex to be efficiently modeled. But what should be kept in mind is that the goal is  $\Phi_{personal}$ . Thus if  $\Phi_{status}$  and  $\Phi_{imaging}$  cannot be directly modeled, why not try to ‘filter out’ these information? Here ‘filter out’ or ‘remove’ a particular information  $\Phi_x$  means making  $\Phi_x$  no longer *variable* in some subspace  $\Gamma$  so that  $\Phi_x$  will no longer affect the classification in  $\Gamma$ . Special attention should be paid to distinguish ‘*variable* in a space’ and ‘*unstable* in a data set’. For example,  $\Phi_{facial}$  is variable in the image space because non-face images are also expressible, but it is stable in a face image set because all images in the set are faces.

Through properly assembling the data set, the problem of filtering out a particular kind of information can be transformed into an easier one: removing the stable/unstable information in the image set. Since  $\Phi_{facial}$  is always stable in a set of face images, it can be removed first. Formally, suppose the information of a face image  $I$  in a multi-personal face image set  $A$  is denoted by  $\Phi_{I \in A}(I)$ , then

$$\Phi_{I \in A}(I) = \underline{\Phi_{status}(I)} + \underline{\Phi_{imaging}(I)} + \underline{\Phi_{personal}(I)} + \underline{\Phi_{facial}(I)}. \quad (1)$$

where the double-underlined terms are the unstable information, and those single-underlined ones are the stable information. Note that ‘+’ in the equation is not the arithmetic operation ‘add’, but means ‘combination’ of the states of different kinds of information. Suppose a subspace  $\Gamma_u$  can be constructed to filter out the stable information and meanwhile preserve the unstable information in the image set ( $\Gamma_u$  is an ideal subspace for this purpose, while the technique described later in Section III-A is an approximation to it), then the information contained in the projection  $\Gamma_u(I)$  will be

$$\begin{aligned}\Phi_{I \in A}(\Gamma_u(I)) &= \underline{\underline{\Phi_{status}(\Gamma_u(I))}} + \underline{\underline{\Phi_{imaging}(\Gamma_u(I))}} + \underline{\underline{\Phi_{personal}(\Gamma_u(I))}} \\ &= \underline{\underline{\Phi_{status}(I)}} + \underline{\underline{\Phi_{imaging}(I)}} + \underline{\underline{\Phi_{personal}(I)}}.\end{aligned}\quad (2)$$

Since only the stable information is removed and all unstable information is preserved, the states of  $\Phi_{status}$ ,  $\Phi_{imaging}$  and  $\Phi_{personal}$  in  $\Gamma_u(I)$  are equal to those in  $I$ . Suppose  $A$  is subsequently divided into  $N$  (the number of persons in  $A$ ) subsets  $A^i, i = 1 \dots N$ , each of which is a single-personal set, then the information of the projections in  $A^i$  will be

$$\Phi_{I \in A^i}(\Gamma_u(I)) = \underline{\underline{\Phi_{status}(I)}} + \underline{\underline{\Phi_{imaging}(I)}} + \underline{\underline{\Phi_{personal}(I)}}.\quad (3)$$

Now only  $\Phi_{personal}$  is the stable information. If a second subspace  $\Gamma_i$  that filters out the unstable information and meanwhile preserves the stable information ( $\Gamma_i$  is also an ideal subspace for this purpose, while the technique described later in Section III-B is an approximation to it) is constructed on the subset of person  $i$ , then the information contained in the projections  $\Gamma_i(\Gamma_u(I))$  will be only  $\Phi_{personal}$ :

$$\Phi_{I \in A^i}(\Gamma_i(\Gamma_u(I))) = \underline{\underline{\Phi_{personal}(\Gamma_i(\Gamma_u(I)))}} = \underline{\underline{\Phi_{personal}(I)}}.\quad (4)$$

Through two subspaces and one data splitting,  $\Phi_{personal}$  is finally extracted from the face images. The subspace  $\Gamma_i$  is called Individual Stable Space (ISS) of the person  $i$  due to two reasons. First, all face images of that person are expected to be stable in  $\Gamma_i$  because all unstable information has been filtered out. Second, since the commonly stable information  $\Phi_{facial}$  has also been removed and only the personally stable information  $\Phi_{personal}$  is left, if the face images from other persons are projected into  $\Gamma_i$ , the projections are expected to be unstable. Thus ISS can be used to design an FRU system.

Different from the existing FR techniques, ISS is the first face recognition method without any restrictions or pre-assumptions about the face images. It actually represents a family of

algorithms. The implementation of ISS depends on the algorithms used to construct the subspaces  $\Gamma_u$  and  $\Gamma_i$ . The next section will describe one of the many possible solutions, which maps a face image into ISS by the Individual Stable Neural Network (ISNN).

### III. INDIVIDUAL STABLE SPACE

The extraction of personal characteristics described in Section II involves two kinds of subspace. The first is the subspace that can filter out the information stable in the training set (the projection from Equation (1) to (2)). The second is the subspace that can filter out the information unstable in the training set (the projection from Equation (3) to (4)). Obviously, these two kinds of subspace have opposite properties. In this section, a method is proposed to map face images into the ISS based on a pair of neural networks with opposite learning rules, namely the Stochastic Gradient Ascent (SGA) network [25] and the anti-Hebbian version of SGA (ASGA) network [36].

#### A. The SGA Network

The training of the SGA network is an unsupervised learning procedure, i.e., no personal ID is needed at this stage. The SGA network [25] was proposed to recursively learn the principal components of the input data stream. The network structure is shown in Fig. 2. It has  $p$  parallel neurons, each of which corresponds to one principal component. For each neuron, the  $n$ -dimensional input vector passes from the left side to the right side after being subtracted by the product of the connection weights and the internal feedback from the output end. The output signal from the right side is used as the input vector to the next neuron. The learning rule of the SGA network is given by

$$y_j(t) = \mathbf{w}_j^T(t-1)\mathbf{x}(t) \quad (5)$$

$$\Delta\mathbf{w}_j(t-1) = \alpha_1 y_j(t) [\mathbf{x}(t) - y_j(t)\mathbf{w}_j(t-1) - 2 \sum_{i<j} y_i(t)\mathbf{w}_i(t-1)] \quad (6)$$

$$\mathbf{w}_j(t) = \mathbf{w}_j(t-1) + \Delta\mathbf{w}_j(t-1) \quad (7)$$

where  $0 < \alpha_1 < 1$  is the learning rate. As proved by Oja [24], for  $t \rightarrow \infty$ , the vectors  $\mathbf{w}_1, \mathbf{w}_2, \dots, \mathbf{w}_p$  will converge to the principal components  $\mathbf{c}_1, \mathbf{c}_2, \dots, \mathbf{c}_p$  of the input data stream.

PCA (Principal Component Analysis) [11] is not new in the literature of face recognition. Much previous work on FRC, including the famous Eigenface method [33] and its variants [22]

[3], uses PCA to extract features from the face images. The initial idea of using PCA in face recognition is an information theory approach of coding and decoding face images. PCA can effectively extract the main variations in a collection of face images and thus can code a face image as a vector of linear weights of the most variable ‘eigenfaces’. In strictly controlled face recognition, such as the case that only moderate expression variation exists in the face images, the Eigenface method can work very well because in such cases, the main variation in the image set is just the variation of  $\Phi_{personal}$ , thus the coding of main variation is approximately the coding of  $\Phi_{personal}$ . However, under uncontrolled conditions, the main variation in the image set might include the variations of  $\Phi_{personal}$ ,  $\Phi_{status}$  and  $\Phi_{imaging}$ . In fact, some misleading variations are even more significant than the variation of  $\Phi_{personal}$ . For instance, it has been shown that the changes caused by illumination could be even larger than the differences between individuals [1]. Thus it is hard for the Eigenface-based methods to achieve good performance under uncontrolled conditions.

Instead of face image coding, the utility of the SGA network in our approach relies on PCA’s ability to filter out the stable component (insignificant variance) of the training set, i.e., the common facial characteristics  $\Phi_{facial}$ . This can also be evidenced by the fact that the first several eigenfaces look like faces. An arbitrary linear combination of these face-like eigenfaces should also be face-like images (share some common facial characteristics). Thus any point in the subspace spanned by these eigenfaces corresponds to a face-like image. Consequently  $\Phi_{facial}$  is no longer variable in such subspace.

Conventionally, the principal components are calculated by eigendecomposing the covariance matrix of the image set. Suppose the face images are  $m_1$  by  $m_2$ , then the dimensionality of the image vector will be  $n = m_1 \times m_2$ , and the covariance matrix  $\Sigma$  will be  $n$  by  $n$ . Directly determining the  $n$ -dimensional eigenvectors and eigenvalues is an intractable task for typical image size. Normally in previous work, this problem was solved by SVD, i.e., first calculating an  $M$  by  $M$  matrix problem, where  $M$  is the number of face images in the training set, and then taking linear combination of the resulting eigenvectors [33]. Under controlled conditions, the possible variations in the face images are limited. So a small number (from tens to hundreds) of face images are enough to compose a representative training set. Thus usually  $M \ll n$ , and the eigen decomposition of an  $M$  by  $M$  matrix is computationally feasible on most machines. However under uncontrolled conditions, the vast possible variations consequentially require a

large training set. So  $M$  is usually comparative to  $n$ , if not larger. As a result, the eigen decomposition of the  $M$  by  $M$  matrix is almost as hard as that of  $\Sigma$ . Fortunately, with the learning rule of the SGA network, the principal components can be recursively approximated, no matter how large  $M$  is (in fact, the larger, the better).

### B. The Supervised ASGA Network

The ASGA network [36] uses the opposite learning rule of the SGA network. It is an anti-Hebbian version of SGA. Since in the second stage of the extraction of  $\Phi_{personal}$ , the projections in the face space need to be divided into subsets according to personal IDs (from Equation (2) to (3)), a supervisory signal  $\chi_k$  should be integrated into the learning rule of the ASGA network trained on the subset with the ID  $k$ . Suppose there are  $N$  different persons in the training set, the personal ID of a particular projection  $\mathbf{y}(t)$  is  $\omega(t)$ , where  $\omega(t)$  can be any of the labels from 1 to  $N$ , then  $\chi_k(\omega(t))$  is defined by

$$\chi_k(\omega(t)) = \begin{cases} 1, & \text{when } \omega(t) = k; \\ 0, & \text{when } \omega(t) \neq k. \end{cases} \quad (8)$$

The structure of the supervised ASGA network is shown in Fig. 3. The output  $\mathbf{y}$  of the SGA network becomes the input vector of the ASGA network. The structure in Fig. 3 is similar to that in Fig. 2, except for the additional supervisory signal. The learning rule of the supervised ASGA network is given by

$$z_j^{(k)}(t) = \mathbf{w}_j^{(k)\mathbf{T}}(t-1)\mathbf{y}(t), \quad (9)$$

$$\Delta \mathbf{w}_j^{(k)}(t-1) = -\alpha_2 \chi_k(\omega(t)) z_j^{(k)}(t) [\mathbf{y}(t) - \frac{z_j^{(k)}(t) \mathbf{w}_j^{(k)}(t-1)}{\|\mathbf{w}_j^{(k)}(t-1)\|^2} - 2 \sum_{i < j} z_i^{(k)}(t) \mathbf{w}_j^{(k)}(t-1)], \quad (10)$$

$$\mathbf{w}_j^{(k)}(t) = \mathbf{w}_j^{(k)}(t-1) + \Delta \mathbf{w}_j^{(k)}(t-1), \quad (11)$$

where  $0 < \alpha_2 < 1$  is the learning rate. Equation (10) is different from Equation (6) at three points. The first is the additional supervisory signal  $\chi_k(\omega(t))$ . If the input projection  $\mathbf{y}(t)$  does not belong to person  $k$ , then no update will take place. The second is that the learning in equation (6) is changed into the opposite direction by adding a minus sign in front. The third is that an explicit normalization term  $\|\mathbf{w}_j^{(k)}(t-1)\|^2$  is inserted to guarantee that the magnitude of

$\mathbf{w}_j^{(k)}(t)$  is of unit length. It was proved [37] that for  $t \rightarrow \infty$ ,  $\mathbf{w}_j^{(k)}(t)$  will converge to the least variable components of the input data. Such components are called minor components [36].

As principal components filtering out the stable information, minor components filter out the unstable information in the data set. In Equation (3), both  $\Phi_{status}$  and  $\Phi_{imaging}$  are unstable, which are responsible for the main variance in the data set. Thus the subspace spanned by the minor components only reserves  $\Phi_{personal}$ . Similar to principal components, the minor components can also be calculated through eigendecomposition, but ASGA is more efficient. Moreover, since we have used SGA network in the previous step, using ASGA in this step is helpful to result in an integrated framework of solution.

### C. Individual Stable Neural Network

The architecture of the Individual Stable Neural Network (ISNN) is shown in Fig. 4. The first subnet of the ISNN is a SGA network. The raw face image  $\mathbf{x}$  is first input into this SGA subnet to get its projection  $\mathbf{y}$  in the face space. Then  $\mathbf{y}$  is input into the  $N$  (the number of different individuals) ASGA subnets together with the supervisory signal  $\chi(\omega(t)) = [\chi_1(\omega(t)), \chi_2(\omega(t)), \dots, \chi_N(\omega(t))]$ . The output of the ASGA subnet  $k$  will be the projection  $\mathbf{z}^{(k)}$  in the ISS of person  $k$ . Then each ISS is centralized to the mean of the projections of the training set  $\bar{\mathbf{z}}^{(k)}$ . Such centralized ISS is called  $k$ -stable-space.  $\bar{\mathbf{z}}^{(k)}$  is calculated after the convergence of the SGA and ASGA subnets by

$$\bar{\mathbf{z}}^{(k)} = \frac{\sum_t \chi_k(\omega(t)) \mathbf{z}^{(k)}(t)}{\sum_t \chi_k(\omega(t))} \quad (12)$$

Fig. 5 gives a real example. Person  $A$  and  $B$  are two individuals randomly selected from the CMU PIE database [30]. The face images of each person are randomly divided into two parts, one (training set) is used to train the ISNN, and the other (test set) is projected into the ISS through the trained ISNN. Fig. 5(a) shows the projections in the  $A$ -stable-space. It can be seen that the projections of Person  $A$  (circles) converge around the origin while those of Person  $B$  (plus signs) scatter in the space. Fig. 5(b) shows what happens in the  $B$ -stable-space. This time, the projections of Person  $A$  scatter while those of Person  $B$  converge around the origin. The two projected classes are not completely disjoint because the ISS is only 2-dimensional for visualization purpose. In fact, such a low dimensional subspace is not sufficient for the task of FRU. In the experiments described later, the ISS usually has tens of dimensions. Table I shows

TABLE I

AVERAGE DISTANCE FROM THE ISS ORIGIN TO THE PROJECTIONS OF THE SAME/DIFFERENT PERSONS

Avg. Distance	PIE	FERET	FRU
$\bar{d}_{same}$	0.0105	0.0360	0.0103
$\bar{d}_{different}$	0.1139	0.1560	0.1255
$\bar{d}_{same}/\bar{d}_{different}$	9.22%	23.08%	8.24%

the average distance from the origin of the ISS to the projections of the same ( $\bar{d}_{same}$ ) or different ( $\bar{d}_{different}$ ) persons on the three data sets (PIE, FERET and FRU) used in the experiment section. The dimensionality of the ISS in the experiments is set to 20. As can be seen, in all cases,  $\bar{d}_{same}$  is much smaller than  $\bar{d}_{different}$ , which indicates the key property of ISS that the images from the same person appear stable while those from different persons appear unstable. Thus ISNN is an effective tool to map face images into ISS.

#### IV. ISS-BASED FACE RECOGNITION

##### A. The Algorithms

The ISNN described in Section III-C can map a face image  $\mathbf{x}$  into the centralized ISS of each individual. The output of the ISNN is  $N$  projections  $\mathbf{z}_c^{(1)}, \mathbf{z}_c^{(2)}, \dots, \mathbf{z}_c^{(N)}$  in the ISS of  $N$  different individuals respectively. As mentioned in Section II, the face images of person  $k$  will be stable only in the  $k$ -stable-space. Contrarily, the most stable projection will indicate the ID of the face image. If a function  $S(\mathbf{z})$  is defined to measure the stability of the projection  $\mathbf{z}$  (larger value of  $S(\mathbf{z})$  means more stable), then the personal ID of  $\mathbf{x}$  is given by

$$r = \arg \max_{j=1}^N [S(\mathbf{z}_c^{(j)})] \quad (13)$$

Different definitions of  $S(\mathbf{z})$  will result in different recognition algorithms. In this paper, three definitions of  $S(\mathbf{z})$  are studied:

$$S_1(\mathbf{z}) = -\|\mathbf{z}\| \quad (14)$$

$$S_2(\mathbf{z}) = -\sqrt{\mathbf{z}'\mathbf{C}^{-1}\mathbf{z}} \quad (15)$$

$$S_3(\mathbf{z}) = -\frac{1}{M'} \sum_{i=1}^{M'} \|\mathbf{z} - \mathbf{z}_i\| \quad (16)$$

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**Algorithm 1:** ISS-based Face Recognition
 

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// **Training Process:**

**Data:** Training images with IDs

**Result:** ISNN

- Train the SGA subnet using all training images (Equations (5), (6), (7));
- Train an ASGA subnet for each individual using the output of the SGA subnet and the corresponding IDs (Equations (9), (10), (11));
- Centralize the ISS for each individual (Equation (12));

// **Test Process:**

**Input:** Test image  $x$ , trained ISNN

**Output:** ID of the test image  $r$

- $x$  goes through the ISNN, getting  $z_c^{(j)}, j = 1, \dots, N$ ;
  - Calculate the stability of  $z_c^{(j)}, S(z_c^{(j)})$  (Equation (14), or (15), or (16));
  - $r \leftarrow \arg \max_{j=1}^N [S(z_c^{(j)})]$ ;
- 

$S_1$  is the negative Euclidean distance from  $z$  to the mean of the training set (the origin of the centralized ISS).  $S_2$  is the negative Mahalanobis distance from  $z$  to the mean of the training set, where the covariance matrix  $C$  can be estimated from the training set.  $S_3$  is the negative average Euclidean distance from  $z$  to the projections of the training images  $z_i$ , where  $M'$  is the number of images from a particular person. The algorithms corresponding to the three definitions are denoted by ISS1, ISS2 and ISS3 respectively. The whole solution is summarized in Algorithm 1.

It might be argued that ISNN requires training of one network for each person, thus it is inefficient for large databases. For this we shall note that ISNN adopts the so-called One-Class-One-Network (OCON) structure, which has certain advantages over the All-Class-One-Network (ACON) structure, such as less hidden units, faster convergence, and better generalization [38]. Moreover, such architecture can easily benefit from distributed computing. It is also suitable for incremental learning. If a new individual needs to be enrolled into the system, the existing ISNN does not need to be re-trained. This is because the SGA subnet describes the general concept of

face, which has already been well trained when the ISNN is first set up. The only thing to do when enrolling a new individual is to add a new ASGA subnet and train it using the new face images. Moreover, since uncontrolled conditions require a relatively large training set, the efficiency of computing principal/minor components could be further improved, such as using adaptive approaches [12]. Nevertheless, ISNN is proposed as one of the many possible implementations of ISS. The main purpose is to illustrate the effectiveness of ISS in a straightforward way. Further consideration on efficiency could be carried out within the framework of ISS in the future. Finally, all the efficiency issues only exist in the training process. Once the ISNN is built, the recognition of a new face image (going through the ISNN) will be very fast.

### B. Relationship to Existing Work

As mentioned before, more or less, existing FR methods usually put some restrictions on the face images (most of them are designed for one or several variations, but not for all possible variations). Thus under uncontrolled conditions, their performance appears unstable. On the other hand, the ISS-based method concentrates on  $\Phi_{personal}$  and tries to filter out all other information without any pre-assumptions of the face images. Thus it is more suitable for uncontrolled conditions. Existing FR techniques dealing with large facial variations roughly follow four streams: (i) algorithms based on local facial features [6] [26], (ii) algorithms based on discriminant analysis [3] [39], (iii) algorithms based on nonlinear subspace/manifold [20] [5], and (iv) algorithms based on multiple classifiers/subspaces [15] [21] [29].

The first category is based on the assumption that some local facial features might be invariant when certain kinds of  $\Phi_{status}$  or  $\Phi_{imaging}$  change. One typical method in this category is Eigenfeature [26], which constructs eigenspaces for eyes, nose and mouth, respectively. The combination of Eigenfeature and Eigenface (Eigenfeature+Eigenface) can be viewed as a layered representation of a face, where a coarse description of the whole face is augmented by additional details in terms of salient facial features, and therefore better performance was observed [26]. The main problem of such kinds of methods is that the relationship between local features and  $\Phi_{status}$  or  $\Phi_{imaging}$  is very complex. Thus key issues like how many features, which features, the extension and position of each feature region are usually empirically determined. Under uncontrolled conditions, this problem becomes more serious: intuitively, no local features can keep invariant with uncontrolled changes of  $\Phi_{status}$  and  $\Phi_{imaging}$ .

Fisherface [3] is a representative of the second category. It tries to find a global feature space that maximizes the ratio of the extrapersonal difference and the intrapersonal difference by applying Fisher's Linear Discriminant (FLD). Fisherface was proposed to tackle illumination and expression variations and it does work well supposing no other variations are present. However, under uncontrolled conditions, one global linear subspace might not be powerful enough to clearly separate different persons. There might be two possible solutions. One is nonlinear global subspace (the third category), and the other is multiple subspaces (the fourth category).

It has become a recent trend to apply nonlinear subspace [20] or manifold [5] techniques to robust face recognition. Face images are believed to be distributed on nonlinear manifolds in the observation space [28]. Thus better performance could be expected by using nonlinear techniques, such as KPCA [20]. However, most existing nonlinear subspace/manifold methods have one or more of the following problems: (a) Vulnerable to overfitting; (b) Computationally expensive; (c) Many of them cannot be directly applied to classification tasks (such as the famous Isomap [32]); (d) Under uncontrolled conditions, variations of  $\Phi_{status}$  and  $\Phi_{imaging}$  might be more significant than that of  $\Phi_{personal}$ . But most nonlinear subspace/manifold methods cannot distinguish them.

Since ISS constructs one subspace for each individual, it belongs to the fourth category. Typical algorithms in this category include Probabilistic Decision-Based Neural Network (PDBNN) [15], Face Specific Subspace (FSS) [29], and Bayesian face recognition [21]. Both PDBNN and ISNN adopt the One-Class-One-Network (OCON) structure. However, the effectiveness of PDBNN relies on the ability of the mixture of Gaussians to approximate any data distribution, while the effectiveness of ISNN relies on the extraction of the only useful information for recognition  $\Phi_{personal}$ . FSS also utilizes the idea of personalized subspace. This method directly trains an eigenspace on the face images of each person, and then uses the reconstruction error in the eigenspace as a similarity measure. Since the space spanned by the principal components is orthogonal to that spanned by the minor components, the reconstruction error in the former space equals the Euclidean distance from the projection to the origin in the latter space. Thus FSS is actually similar to the second step of ISS1. There are two main advantages of the ISS-based methods over FSS. The first is that FSS only filters out  $\Phi_{status}$  and  $\Phi_{imaging}$ . When both  $\Phi_{facial}$  and  $\Phi_{personal}$  are stable in the subspace, it is not reliable to expect the projection to be unstable just because  $\Phi_{personal}$  is different. The second advantage is that the ISS-based method explicitly calculates the projections in the ISS ( $z_c^{(k)}$  in Fig. 4). This provides more room for further

improvements, such as the Mahalanobis distance used in ISS2, and the average Euclidean distance used in ISS3. Bayesian face recognition models the extrapersonal and intrapersonal differences with two subspaces. However, under uncontrolled conditions, the possible cases of both kinds of differences will exponentially grow to an unmanageable size. On the other hand, the ISS-based methods avoid directly modeling different kinds of information, but tries to filter out all useless information and only retain what is useful for recognition.

## V. EXPERIMENTS

### A. Methodology

In the experiments, firstly ISS1 is compared with those related methods described in Section IV-B and some of their variants. Then the properties of the ISS-based algorithm are analyzed, including the comparison of ISS1, ISS2 and ISS3.

Three data sets are used in the experiments. The first is the CMU PIE database [30]. The face images are greatly different in pose, illumination and expression. The completely dark (without any illumination) images are removed from the database, which leaves 38,707 images from 68 individuals used in our experiments. The faces are normalized by fixing the positions of the two eyes (for those profile faces, the positions of one eye and the nose tip are used). The normalized face image has  $66 \times 46$  pixels. Some typical normalized faces are shown in Fig. 6(a). The second data set is a subset of the grayscale FERET database [27]. Most subjects in the FERET database just have several face images with limited variations. To simulate the uncontrolled conditions, those subjects with at least 30 different face images are selected from the FERET database. In total there are 56 persons selected. Their face images remarkably vary in pose, illumination, expression, occlusion (glasses) and image-taken date. Compared to the possible variations, the number of face images per person is relatively small, which greatly increases the difficulty of accurate recognition. The face images are normalized by the same method used on the PIE database, resulting in the  $66 \times 46$  images. Some typical images are shown in Fig. 6(b). The third data set is used to test the algorithms in another case: fewer individuals, sufficient face images per person, but with more variations. We have collected 23,978 images from 14 individuals through a web camera to compose the FRU face database. This database attempts to simulate most possible variations in real face recognition applications. The variations include

TABLE II  
VARIATIONS IN THE THREE FACE IMAGE SETS

Data Set	Pose	Illumination	Expression	Talking	Occlusion
PIE	13	45	3	2	2
FERET	20	2	2	N/A	2
FRU	Uncontrolled	Uncontrolled	3	2	4
Data Set	Date Taken	Noise	Face Detection	Subjects	Images/Person (Avg.)
PIE	N/A	N/A	Manual	68	569
FERET	Within 3 Years	N/A	Manual	56	39
FRU	Within 1 Month	Web Camera	Inaccurate	14	1712

pose, illumination, expression, talking, occlusion (with/without cap, scarf, and glasses), image-taken date, and imaging noise. Moreover, in the experiments, the faces are only roughly cropped from the background (without face detection, rotation and scale) to test the tolerance of the algorithms to inaccurate face detections. The cropped face image has  $55 \times 42$  pixels (different from the PIE database and the FERET database because of different normalization method). Some typical faces from this database are shown in Fig. 6(c). Note that some faces are partly out of the cropped image, which can be regarded as a special case of occlusion. For all three data sets, after the geometric normalization, the images are histogram equalized and then vectorized to a 0-mean, 1-variance vector.

The possible intra-personal variations, the number of different subjects, and the average number of images per person in the three face image sets are summarized in Table II. The numbers in the table indicate how many possible cases for each item. ‘N/A’ means no such variation. ‘Uncontrolled’ means no limitation on the possible cases. It can be seen that the three data sets correspond to the following three cases:

- *Case 1 (PIE)*: Many different subjects, many possible intra-personal variations, sufficient face images per person;
- *Case 2 (FERET)*: Many different subjects, many possible intra-personal variations, insufficient face images per person;
- *Case 3 (FRU)*: Fewer subjects, uncontrolled intra-personal variations, sufficient face images per person.

Note that although most face images in PIE and FERET are obtained in controlled environments,

the control information (such as the pose and lighting labels) is not used to train ISS in the experiments. Moreover, these two databases are with perhaps the most diversified variations among the publicly available face databases. Thus they can be viewed as good simulations of uncontrolled conditions. Another issue is that the number of images per person may seem too many to be practical. However, taking into consideration that these images do not need to be obtained in a controlled environment, it is not difficult to obtain a large amount of images from each person. For instance, using an ordinary web camera with frame rate 30 fps, 1712 face images can be obtained in 57 seconds.

There are remarkable illumination and pose variations in both databases. Among the methods mentioned in Section IV-B, only Eigenface is not specially designed to deal with illumination variation. It has been reported that discarding the first few eigenfaces will endow Eigenface with certain ability to handle illumination variation [3]. This is tested in the experiments by discarding the first three eigenfaces, which is denoted by Eigenface-3. As for the pose variation, except for ISS, PDBNN, FSS, Eigenfeature+Eigenface, and KPCA, none of the other methods is designed for the multi-view case. So a multi-view version is extended for each of them in a way similar to the View-based Eigenface [26] (abbreviated as V-Eigenface). The multi-view algorithms are denoted by V-Bayes, V-Fisherface and V-(Eigenface-3), respectively.

In the experiments, the parameters of PDBNN are empirically determined through several trials. When the best performance is observed, the number of Gaussians for each individual is set to 6, the learning rate for the Gaussian centers is set to  $10^{-6}$ , the learning rate for the variance is set to  $10^{-4}$ , the learning rate for the threshold is set to 0.05, and the penalty function for the threshold is the sigmoid function. As for the Bayes method, similar to [21], 1,000 intrapersonal difference images and 4,000 extrapersonal difference images are randomly sampled as the training set. The class conditional density is estimated by the subspace density estimation technique [23]. For Fisherface, as described in [3], the face images are first projected into an  $(M - N)$ -dimensional subspace using PCA, and then using FLD to reduce the dimensionality to  $N - 1$ , where  $M$  is the number of training images, and  $N$  is the number of persons. For Eigenfeature+Eigenface, only left eye, right eye and nose are used because most expressions are related to mouth. KPCA uses the RBF kernel with the bias 1. If not explicitly stated, the number of principal components  $p$  is set to 50 for all other algorithms using PCA. Usually the first 50 principal components will explain about 90% variance in the data set for most methods

compared in this experiment. The number 50 is not deliberately tuned because different methods might favor different subspace dimensionality. For a fair comparison, all methods should use the same subspace dimensionality. However, since ISS needs to calculate  $m$  minor components based on the 50 principal components,  $m$  must be less than 50 (in fact, this can be considered ‘unfair’ to ISS since it uses lower dimensional features than other methods). In the comparative experiments,  $m$  is set to 20 (explains about 5% variance), which is also not specially chosen in favor of ISS. The value of  $m$  will be further investigated in Section V-B.2. In fact, as can be seen from Fig. 9,  $m = 20$  is not the best choice for ISS. The initial weight vectors in the SGA or ASGA subnet are set to random orthogonal unit vectors. The learning rates in Equation (6) and (10) are set as  $\alpha_1 = \alpha_2 = 0.01$ .

All algorithms are tested by three-fold cross validation. That is, the original face images are randomly divided into three equal-sized subsets while keeping the proportion of each individual. Then in each fold, one subset is used as test set (probe faces) and the union of the remaining two is used as training set (gallery faces). For each algorithm, the average result of these three folds is recorded as the recognition performance. Conforming to the FERET testing protocol [27], both “is the top match correct?” (rank 1 match) and “is the correct answer in the top  $k$  matches?” (rank  $k$  match) are considered. Moreover, the pairwise one-tailed t-test of ISS1 paired with other algorithms at the significance level 0.025 is performed.

## B. Results

1) *Comparative Experiments*: The recognition rates from rank 1 to rank 3 on the PIE database are tabulated in Table III. The best performance in each case is highlighted in bold. The t-test results of ISS1 paired with other algorithms are listed in the parentheses by the corresponding recognition rates. 1, 0 and -1 represent that ISS1 is significantly better, not significantly different, and significantly worse, respectively. Note that the algorithms below the dash-line require additional pose information during training.

Above the dash-line, the best performance is achieved by ISS1, which is significantly better than all the other algorithms. The superiority of ISS1 over FSS mainly comes from the SGA subnet of the ISNN, which removes the common facial characteristics in the face images. It is also worth mentioning that FSS uses a 50-dimensional subspace while ISS1 only uses a 20-dimensional subspace to describe each person. Thus ISS1 is much faster and requires less

TABLE III  
 RECOGNITION RATES (%) ON THE PIE DATABASE

Methods	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3
ISS1	<b>94.16</b>	<b>96.59</b>	<b>97.32</b>
PDBNN	81.70 (1)	88.44 (1)	91.45 (1)
FSS	89.30 (1)	92.62 (1)	94.04 (1)
Bayes	18.58 (1)	25.23 (1)	31.36 (1)
Fisherface	57.96 (1)	67.25 (1)	72.89 (1)
Eigenface	30.27 (1)	39.54 (1)	45.84 (1)
Eigenface-3	45.31 (1)	55.24 (1)	61.10 (1)
Eigenfeature+Eigenface	51.66 (1)	60.55 (1)	66.76 (1)
KPCA	30.42 (1)	40.73 (1)	47.48 (1)
V-Bayes	48.86 (1)	61.33 (1)	68.56 (1)
V-Fisherface	89.88 (1)	93.36 (1)	94.77 (1)
V-Eigenface	65.92 (1)	72.18 (1)	75.58 (1)
V-(Eigenface-3)	85.11 (1)	88.85 (1)	90.60 (1)

storage than FSS. PDBNN performs worse than both ISS1 and FSS. This might be due to the fact that under uncontrolled conditions, the distribution of the face images from each person is so complicated that the gradient descent learning of PDBNN will tend to fall into local optima. The Bayes method results in poor performance, which is not surprising since the sampled difference images are only a small portion of all possible differences in the training set (under uncontrolled conditions, there are huge number of possible difference images due to combination explosion). As reported by previous work [3], Fisherface performs better than Eigenface and its variants because of the utilization of class information. The recognition rate of Eigenface-3 is much higher than that of Eigenface, which is consistent with the statement in [3]. Making use of local facial features also makes Eigenfeature+Eigenface perform better than Eigenface. KPCA is only slightly better than Eigenface. The reason is that KPCA shares the same shortcoming with Eigenface, i.e., under uncontrolled conditions, they cannot distinguish  $\Phi_{personal}$  from  $\Phi_{status}$  and  $\Phi_{imaging}$ . It can also be found that there is a remarkable gap between the recognition rates of the best three methods (ISS1, FSS and PDBNN) and those of the others, which indicates that the personalized approach might be a suitable solution to face recognition under uncontrolled conditions. Considering the view-based algorithms below the dash-line, ISS1 still performs the best. This is impressive because it does not use the additional information. With certain ability

TABLE IV  
RECOGNITION RATES (%) ON THE FERET SUBSET

Methods	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3
ISS1	<b>70.83</b>	<b>78.83</b>	<b>83.88</b>
PDBNN	60.04 (1)	67.69 (1)	71.72 (1)
FSS	65.20 (1)	72.31 (1)	75.93 (1)
Bayes	10.38 (1)	18.78 (1)	24.93 (1)
Fisherface	37.74 (1)	44.61 (1)	50.40 (1)
Eigenface	28.76 (1)	41.94 (1)	50.34 (1)
Eigenface-3	35.31 (1)	46.04 (1)	52.25 (1)
Eigenfeature+Eigenface	42.49 (1)	53.83 (1)	61.20 (1)
KPCA	21.37 (1)	30.53 (1)	37.16 (1)
V-Bayes	16.63 (1)	22.91 (1)	27.76 (1)
V-Fisherface	64.28 (1)	70.42 (1)	74.39 (1)
V-Eigenface	43.92 (1)	54.24 (1)	60.31 (1)
V-(Eigenface-3)	51.02 (1)	59.43 (1)	64.55 (1)

to handle the pose variation, all the multi-view variants make remarkable improvements over the corresponding original algorithms. Among them, V-Fisherface achieves the highest recognition rate, which slightly exceeds that of FSS, but is still worse than that of ISS1. In practice, the pose information is hard to obtain, especially under uncontrolled conditions. This greatly enlarges the superiority of ISS1 over V-Fisherface.

The recognition rates from rank 1 to rank 3 on the FERET subset are tabulated in Table IV. The number of subjects and possible variations in this data set is similar to that in the PIE database. But the number of images per person is much smaller. Relative to the vast possible variations, the average 39 images per person is insufficient. This can be evidenced by the remarkable accuracy degradation of all algorithms compared with their performance on the PIE database. Note that the high accuracy on FERET database reported in some previous literatures was usually obtained on a subset that restricts some variations, such as the most frequently used FA/FB subset which only contains the frontal face images. But in this test, there is no limitations on the variations.

The relative performance of the 13 algorithms is similar to that on the PIE database. Whether the pose information is available or not, ISS1 performs significantly better than all the other algorithms. The runner-up is FSS, followed by V-Fisherface, and then PDBNN. Among the algorithms above the dash-line, there is also an apparent gap between the accuracy of the best

TABLE V  
RECOGNITION RATES (%) ON THE FRU DATABASE

Methods	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3
ISS1	<b>98.65</b>	<b>99.51</b>	<b>99.79</b>
PDBNN	96.84 (1)	99.04 (1)	99.54 (0)
FSS	96.79 (1)	98.52 (1)	98.99 (1)
Bayes	39.52 (1)	59.96 (1)	73.80 (1)
Fisherface	91.32 (1)	96.56 (1)	98.10 (1)
Eigenface	68.18 (1)	80.63 (1)	86.62 (1)
Eigenface-3	75.24 (1)	86.15 (1)	90.06 (1)
Eigenfeature+Eigenface	50.82 (1)	66.60 (1)	76.12 (1)
KPCA	68.59 (1)	81.40 (1)	86.94 (1)
V-Bayes	53.71 (1)	74.76 (1)	85.78 (1)
V-Fisherface	96.41 (1)	98.56 (1)	99.26 (1)
V-Eigenface	76.01 (1)	86.05 (1)	90.26 (1)
V-(Eigenface-3)	83.56 (1)	90.60 (1)	93.06 (1)

three algorithms (ISS1, PDBNN, and FSS) and that of the others, which again suggests that the personalized approach might be a suitable solution to face recognition under uncontrolled conditions. It is noteworthy that KPCA performs worse than Eigenface. The reason might be that KPCA is relatively easier to overfit the training data. Also, it is always difficult to select the best kernel of KPCA for a particular data set. Since the number of images per person is relatively small, the training data can hardly represent all possibilities well. Thus the overfitting problem will be more serious.

The recognition rates from rank 1 to rank 3 on the FRU database are tabulated in Table V. Since there are only 14 individuals in this database, and each of them has plenty of face images, although more variations are possible, almost all algorithms achieve better performances than those on the PIE database. Note that the main purpose of the experiment on the FRU database is not to compare with those on the PIE database and the FERET subset (it is predictable to get better result on such a database with much fewer persons), but to compare the relative performance of the algorithms under more variable conditions.

The comparative results on the FRU database are similar to those on the PIE database and the FERET subset. Above the dash-line, ISS1 is significantly better than all the other algorithms (with the only exception on the rank 3 recognition rate of PDBNN, where the two algorithms are

not significantly different). PDBNN also achieves a good performance just next to that of ISS1, and better than that of FSS. This might be because with fewer classes, the mixture of Gaussians learned by PDBNN is enough to separate different classes. Different from the previous results, Eigenfeature+Eigenface performs worse than Eigenface, possibly due to the fact that the faces in the FRU database are only roughly cropped from the background while the performance of Eigenfeature heavily depends on the accuracy of the feature locations. Thus the inaccurate face detection causes poor performance of Eigenfeature+Eigenface. Below the dash-line, there is still no other algorithm that achieves accuracy higher than that of ISS1. But with extra pose information, all of the view-based algorithms are better than the original ones.

2) *Properties of the ISS-based Algorithm:* Although the data sets used in the experiments include almost all facial variations ever mentioned in the previous literatures, some insight into how to deal with unseen situations in the future is still required to support the claim of ‘working under uncontrolled conditions’. Since it is impossible to collect an image set that includes all possible facial variations, we abstract the variations as information loss and use missing pixels to simulate it. In detail, the gray scales of a certain proportion of pixels in the face image are randomly set to zeros. Fig. 7 gives the example images with up to 25% missing pixels. The best three algorithms (ISS1, PDBNN and FSS) in the comparative experiments are tested again with the same configuration except that there are from 5% to 25% missing pixels in the test images. The Rank 1 recognition rates with respect to the percentage of missing pixels are plotted in Fig. 8. As expected, all algorithms degrade with the increase of missing pixels. But ISS1 is more robust against missing pixels than the other two. It performs the best in all cases, and its superiority is more significant at higher missing percentages. This reveals a positive future of ISS applying to uncontrolled conditions.

To study the impact of ISS’s dimensionality on the performance of the ISS-based face recognition, different values of  $m$  from 2 to 50, with 2 as the interval, are tested. The Rank 1 recognition rates with different values of  $m$  of ISS1 on the PIE database, the FERET subset, and the FRU database are shown in Fig. 9(a), (b) and (c) respectively.

It can be seen from Fig. 9(a) that the recognition rate of ISS1 increases rapidly to a high level above 90% with the dimensionality increases from 2 to 8. Referring back to Table III, it can be found that without pose information, ISS1 is able to exceed all the other algorithms by using as few as 8 dimensions. Compared with the original image space of  $66 \times 46 = 3036$

dimensions, the efficiency of the extremely-low-dimensional ISS exhibits its ability to extract the only useful information  $\Phi_{personal}$ . When the dimensionality exceeds 8, the performance of ISS1 remains relatively steady above 90% until  $m$  rises to 32. The highest recognition rate (94.29%) is achieved when  $m = 16$ , which is slightly higher than that listed in Table III (when  $m = 20$ ). After that, the recognition rate gradually decreases to as low as about 30%. Note that when  $m$  increases to 50, all the components are used and ISS1 is equivalent to the standard Eigenface method. Fig. 9(b) is similar to Fig. 9(a). With the growth of  $m$ , the accuracy of ISS1 increases rapidly, exceeds those of all other methods when  $m = 12$ , achieves the best performance (71.79%) when  $m = 28$ , stays relatively steady until  $m$  increases to 40, and then drops to the level of standard Eigenface. Note that the dimensionality required to exceed other methods and achieve the best performance is higher than that on the PIE database. This might be due to the relatively small number of images per person, which makes the ASGA subnets in the ISNN hard to converge to the real minor component, and thus more dimensions are needed to describe  $\Phi_{personal}$ . The situation in Fig. 9(c) is also similar. The recognition rate of ISS1 starts from 79.14%, surpasses all the baseline algorithms when the dimensionality increases to 8, achieves the best performance when the dimensionality equals to 14, and then gradually decreases to the level of standard Eigenface (68.18%).

Fig. 9 reveals that too low or too high dimensionality of ISS may both lead to performance degradation. Too low dimensional ISS may not be able to capture all information from  $\Phi_{personal}$ , and too high dimensional ISS may also contain the information from  $\Phi_{status}$  and  $\Phi_{imaging}$ . However, the relatively wide scale of  $m$  that corresponds to steady performance means not much effort on parameter tuning is needed for the ISS-based method to obtain a good result.

The performances of ISS1, ISS2 and ISS3 on the PIE database, the FERET subset, and the FRU database are compared in Fig. 10(a), (b), and (c) respectively. It can be seen that on all data sets the ISS-based algorithms can be further improved. The performances of the three algorithms can be sorted as  $ISS3 > ISS2 > ISS1$ . Note that the only difference among the three algorithms is the definition of the stability measurement function  $S(z)$ . Thus the improvement of ISS3 and ISS2 over ISS1 comes from the more sophisticated measurements of stability. Of course, special domain knowledge could be considered to design other stability measurements for even better performance.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

This paper presents one of the first attempts toward face recognition under uncontrolled conditions (FRU), which extends our preliminary work [8]. The proposed method is based on a subspace called Individual Stable Space (ISS), which only expresses the information of personal characteristics. The concept of ISS is derived from the analysis of the four different kinds of information contained in the face images. Instead of the ‘divide and conquer’ strategy, i.e., modeling different kinds of information one by one, this paper focuses on what is useful for the task of face recognition and tries to filter out all other information. A neural network structure named Individual Stable Neural Network (ISNN) is proposed to realize ISS. On this basis, three ISS-based algorithms are designed for FRU. The ISS-based method is compared with 12 existing face recognition techniques on three large databases with vast variations and achieves the best performance. Moreover, unlike many other face recognition algorithms, the ISS-based method does not require any extra information, such as face poses, which makes it more practical and reliable.

The ISS-based approach can be viewed as a general framework for FRU. Other novel subspace methods, including both linear and nonlinear ones, may be utilized to realize ISS to further improve the effectiveness or efficiency of ISNN. This will be one of the major future works following this paper.

Currently, the training data for the ISS-based algorithms must contain many kinds of variations, which requires at least tens of images per person. Since the images do not require a controlled environment, creating a face database with many images per person can be easily done by an ordinary video camera. However, for those existing face databases without so many images per person, it is usually too costly to rebuild the whole database. In such a case, the problem might be partly solved by simulating different variations from single face image, such as the methods designed for addressing the problem of face recognition with one training image per person [31] [35], and the illumination simulation method used in [29]. Other more complex variations, such as viewing angle [9], aging effect [7], etc., might be simulated from single face image as well. This is another important future work.

Although the ISS-based algorithm is designed for uncontrolled face recognition, it might have many other applications in pattern recognition. Generally speaking, the first subspace is

trained on all data to filter out common characteristics. Then the projections in the subspace are divided into subsets according to the class labels. After that a subspace that filters out the variable information is trained on each subset. These subspaces are expected to express only the information related to the class labels. Thus ISS can be viewed as a model of complex patterns, and might be further explored in other tasks of pattern recognition in the future.

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## FIGURE CAPTIONS

Fig. 1. Extraction of  $\Phi_{personal}$ ,  $\Phi_{facial}$ ,  $\Phi_{status}$ , and  $\Phi_{imaging}$  by linear subspaces.

Fig. 2. The SGA network. The input to the network is a  $n$ -dimensional vector  $\mathbf{x} = [x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n]$ , and the output is a  $p$ -dimensional ( $p < n$ ) feature  $\mathbf{y} = [y_1, y_2, \dots, y_p]$ .

Fig. 3. The supervised ASGA network for person  $k$ . The input to the network is a  $p$ -dimensional vector  $\mathbf{y} = [y_1, y_2, \dots, y_p]$  and the supervisory signal  $\chi_k(\omega(t))$ , the output is a  $m$ -dimensional ( $m < p$ ) feature  $\mathbf{z}^{(k)} = [z_1^{(k)}, z_2^{(k)}, \dots, z_m^{(k)}]$ .

Fig. 4. The architecture of ISNN. The thick lines represent vector signals, and the thin lines represent scalar signals.

Fig. 5. Projections in ISS. (a) Projections in the  $A$ -stable-space. (b) Projections in the  $B$ -stable-space.

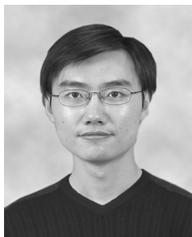
Fig. 6. Typical face images from (a) the CMU PIE database, (b) the FERET database, (c) the FRU database.

Fig. 7. Face images with (a) 0% (original), (b) 5%, (c) 10%, (d) 15%, (e) 20%, and (f) 25% missing pixels.

Fig. 8. Rank 1 recognition rates of ISS1, PDBNN and FSS with respect to the percentage of missing pixels on (a) the PIE database, (b) the FERET subset and (c) the FRU database.

Fig. 9. Rank 1 recognition rates of ISS1 as a function of the ISS's dimensionality on (a) the PIE database, (b) the FERET subset and (c) the FRU database.

Fig. 10. Comparison of ISS1, ISS2 and ISS3 on (a) the PIE database, (b) the FERET subset, and (c) the FRU database.



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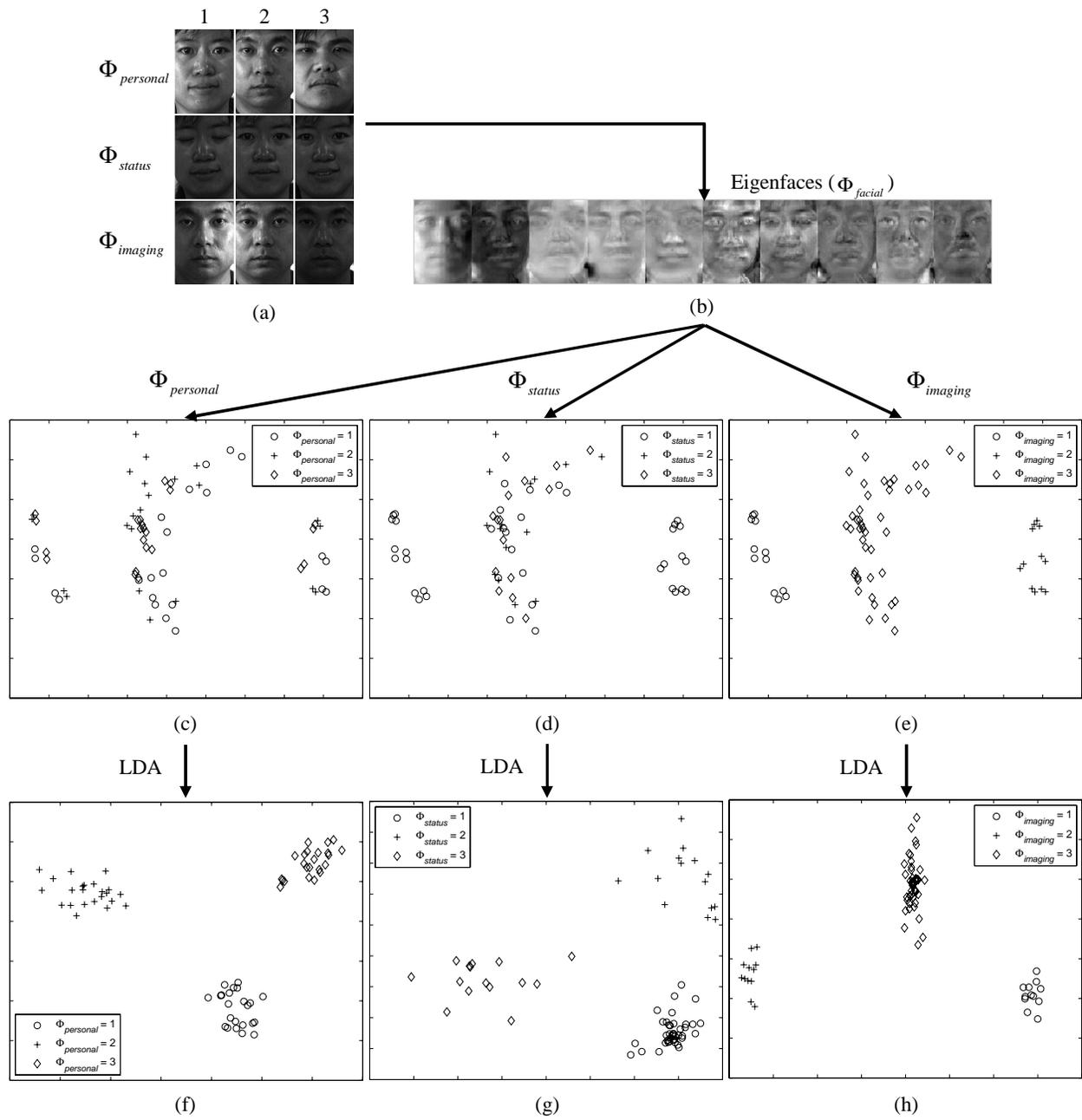


Fig. 1.

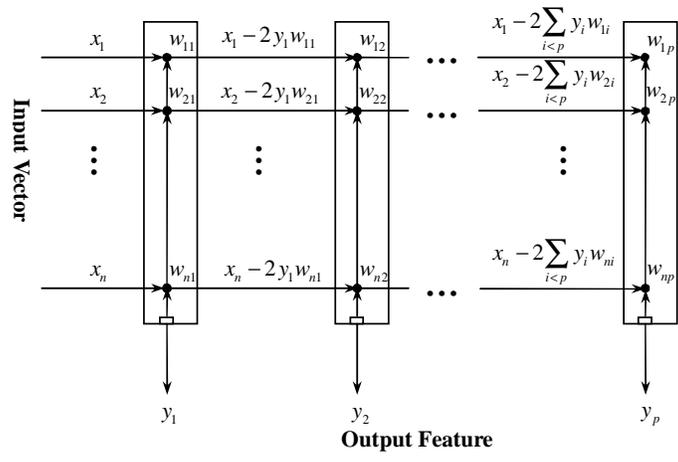


Fig. 2.

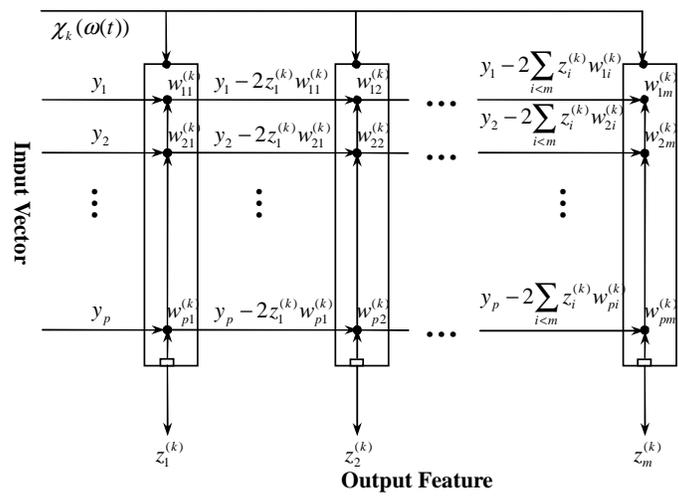


Fig. 3.

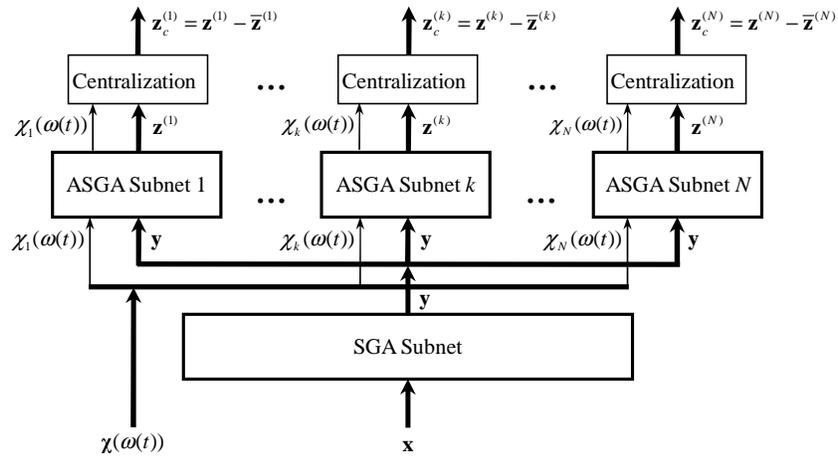


Fig. 4.

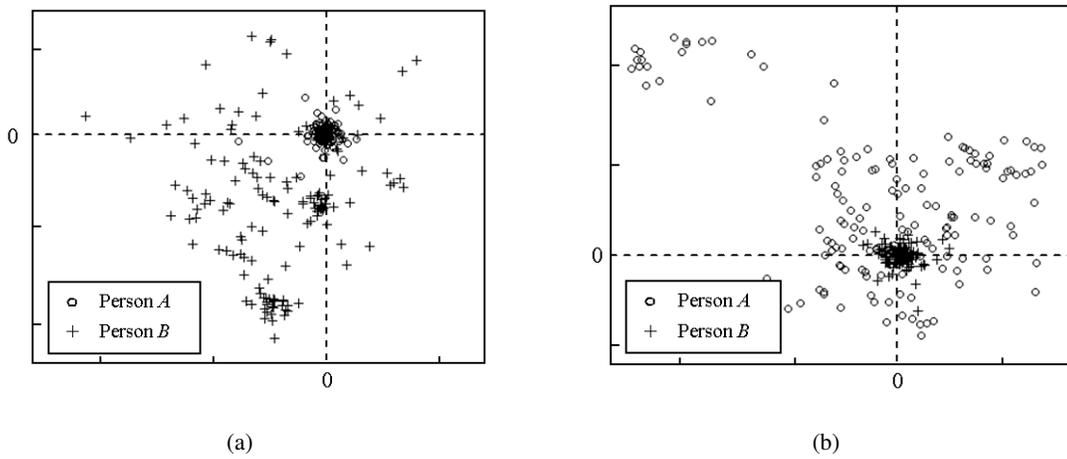


Fig. 5.

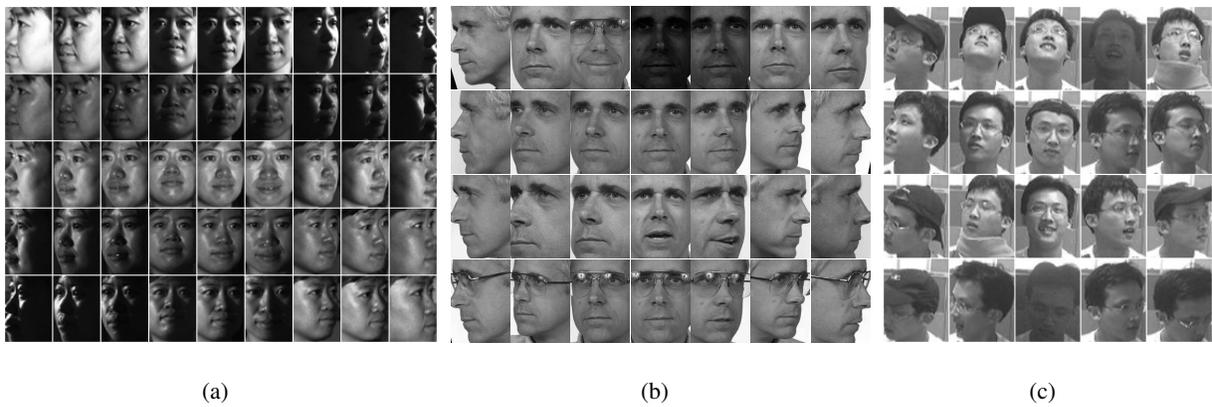


Fig. 6.

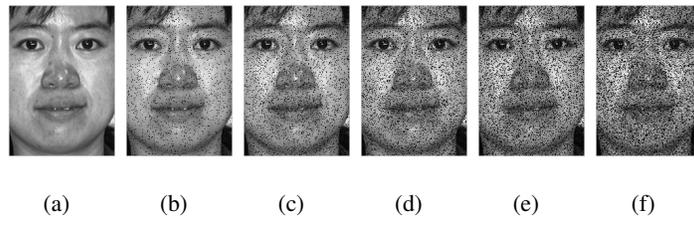


Fig. 7.

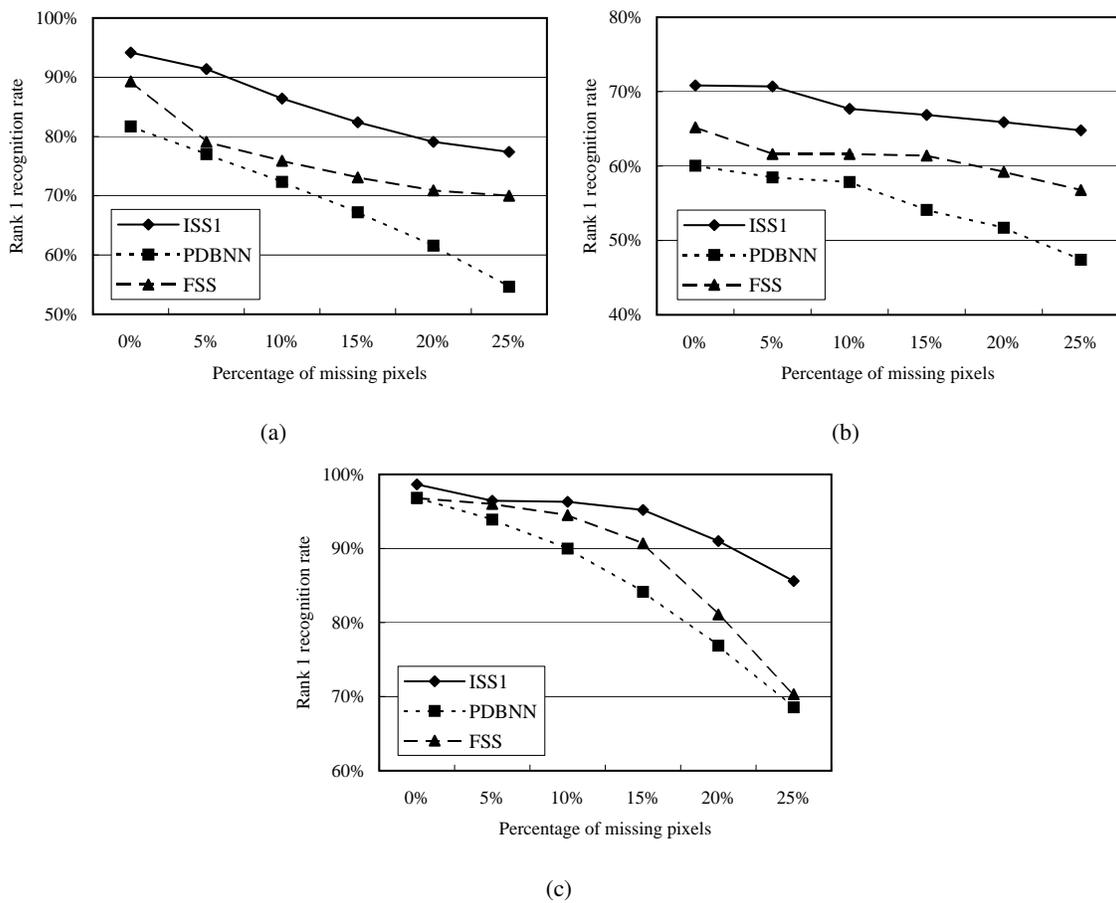


Fig. 8.

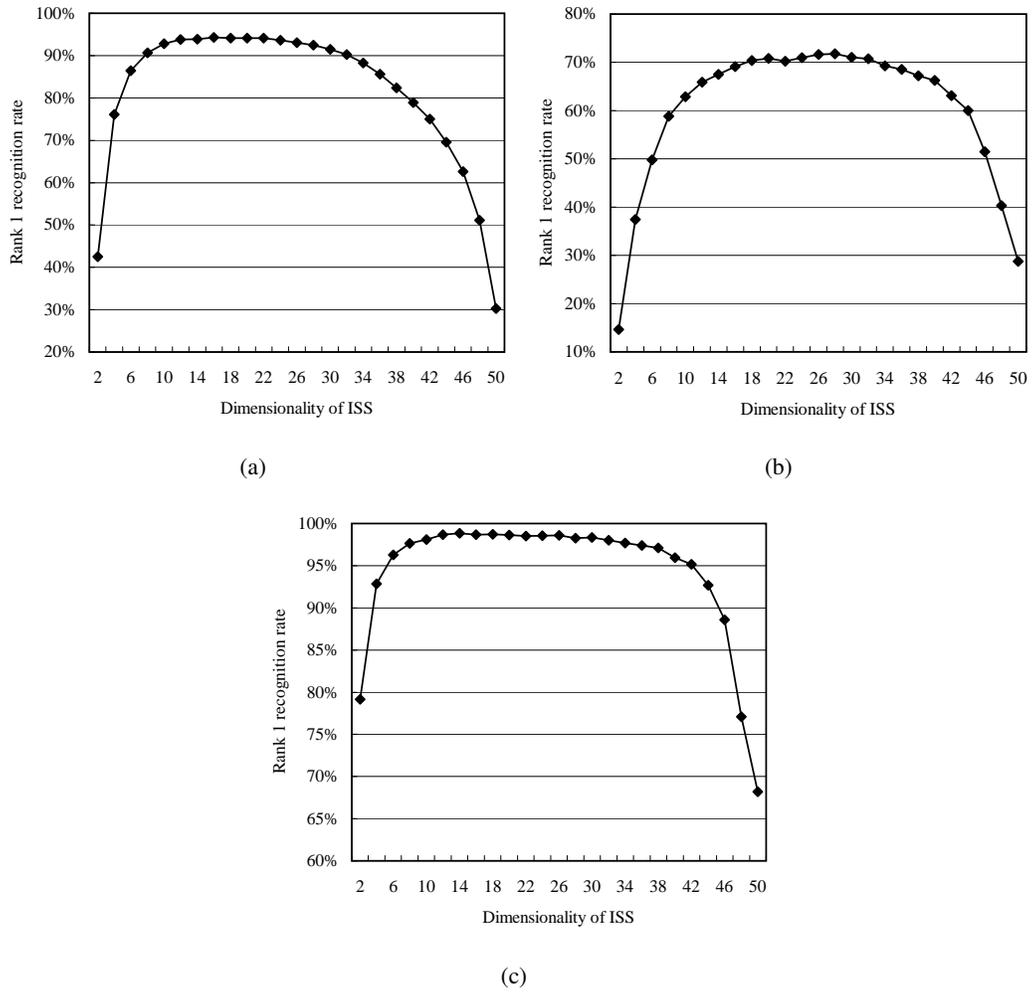


Fig. 9.

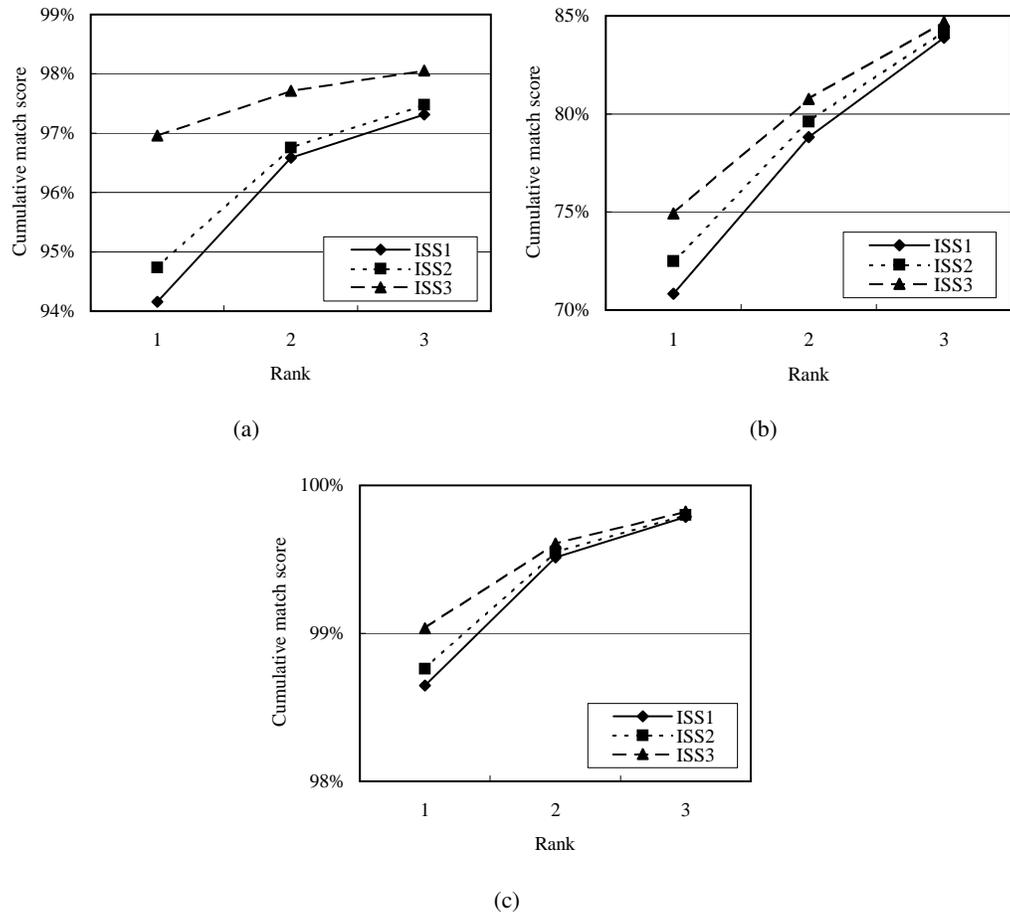


Fig. 10.