

**A DEEP RESIDUAL AND RECURRENT HYBRID FRAMEWORK FOR
AUTOMATED LIVER TUMOR CLASSIFICATION IN CT IMAGING****¹Dr.K. Dharmarajan,**

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ABSTRACT

Liver cancer remains one of the most lethal and aggressive malignancies worldwide, necessitating early, high-precision diagnostic systems. Conventional radiological evaluation of multi-phase computed tomography (CT) scans is frequently labor-intensive, subjective, and prone to inter-observer variability. In this paper, we propose a novel hybrid deep learning architecture combining deep residual feature extraction (ResNet50) with bidirectional long short-term memory (BiLSTM) temporal context aggregators for automated hepatocellular carcinoma detection and classification. Our framework incorporates an advanced region-of-interest (ROI) spatial attention mechanism coupled with automated noise reduction preprocessing. Evaluated on a heterogeneous multi-center dataset of 4,820 clinical CT volumes, the proposed model achieves a peak classification accuracy of 97.8%, a sensitivity of 97.1%, and an area under the receiver operating characteristic curve (AUC-ROC) of 0.992. Furthermore, Grad-CAM visual interpretability analyses validate that the network clinically aligns with focal hepatic lesion markers, establishing a reliable decision-support paradigm for oncological radiology.

Index Terms—

Convolutional Neural Networks, Deep Learning, Hepatocellular Carcinoma, Medical Image Segmentation, Multi-Phase CT Imaging, ResNet50-BiLSTM.

I. INTRODUCTION

LIVER malignancy, particularly hepatocellular carcinoma (HCC), represents the third leading cause of cancer-related mortality globally [1]. Early detection and accurate staging are paramount for determining curative treatment modalities such as surgical resection, radiofrequency ablation, or orthotopic liver transplantation [2]. Multi-phase computed tomography (CT) serves as the frontline imaging modality for characterizing focal hepatic lesions across non-contrast, arterial, portal-venous, and delayed phases. However, interpreting complex dynamic enhancement patterns across multiple spatial dimensions requires extensive radiological expertise and is highly susceptible to diagnostic fatigue and subjective misinterpretation.

In recent years, deep learning (DL) and convolutional neural networks (CNNs) have revolutionized computerized medical image analysis [3]. Automated diagnostic frameworks offer unprecedented potential to reduce false-negative rates and quantify tumor burdens with high reproducibility [4]. Despite significant advancements, standard CNN architectures encounter severe limitations when applied to abdominal CT scans. First, intra-hepatic structural variations, overlapping soft tissue densities, and subtle boundary contrast between benign cysts, hemangiomas, and malignant neoplasms hinder robust feature representation. Second, traditional 2D spatial models fail to exploit inter-slice spatial-temporal correlations inherent in volumetric CT scans.

To address these critical bottlenecks, this paper introduces a comprehensive, end-to-end hybrid deep learning framework optimized for liver tumor detection and multiclass classification. The primary contributions of this research are summarized as follows:

- 1) We propose a novel hybrid ResNet50-BiLSTM architecture that seamlessly integrates deep residual spatial feature extraction with bidirectional sequential memory modeling across volumetric CT slice sequences.
- 2) We formulate an optimized anisotropic diffusion filtering and adaptive windowing preprocessing pipeline that enhances low-contrast hepatic parenchymal boundaries while suppressing high-frequency acquisition noise.
- 3) We perform rigorous validation on a multi-center dataset comprising 4,820 clinical CT volumes, demonstrating superior performance metrics over state-of-the-art baselines.
- 4) We deploy Gradient-weighted Class Activation Mapping (Grad-CAM) to provide pixel-level explainability, aligning model attention maps with verified oncological landmarks.

II. RELATED WORK

The evolution of computer-aided diagnosis (CAD) in hepatic imaging has transitioned from hand-crafted radiomic feature engineering to deep representation learning [5]. Early investigations predominantly relied on texture descriptors such as Gray-Level Co-occurrence Matrices (GLCM) and Local Binary Patterns (LBP) combined with traditional machine learning classifiers like Support Vector Machines (SVM) and Random Forests [6]. While effective in constrained datasets, these handcrafted pipelines lacked generalization capability across multi-scanner and multi-institution cohorts.

With the proliferation of deep learning, fully convolutional networks (FCNs) and U-Net variants established dominance in liver and tumor segmentation [7]. Christ et al. introduced a cascaded U-Net framework for simultaneous liver and lesion segmentation, achieving promising volumetric Dice scores. Concurrently, 3D CNN architectures were proposed by Litjens et al. to capture volumetric spatial contexts directly. However, 3D convolutions demand immense computational memory, restricting batch sizes and spatial resolution depth.

Hybrid topologies bridging spatial CNN encoders with sequential recurrent units (e.g., LSTM, GRU) have recently gained traction in volumetric medical analysis [8]. By treating CT slices as sequential temporal frames, recurrent modules model inter-slice anatomical continuity without the exponential parameter blowup of 3D convolutions. Building upon these foundations, our proposed framework incorporates residual bottleneck blocks for fine-grained feature extraction followed by bidirectional temporal aggregators to resolve ambiguity in indeterminate hepatic lesions.

III. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

The overall architecture of the proposed liver cancer analysis framework consists of three principal stages: (A) Preprocessing and Volume Normalization, (B) Spatial Feature Extraction via Modified ResNet50, and (C) Sequential Context Aggregation via BiLSTM.

C. Preprocessing and Windowing

Raw DICOM CT volumes exhibit considerable intensity variance across scanners due to differing tube currents and reconstruction kernels. We normalize pixel intensities using standard liver windowing parameters (Window Width: $W = 150$ HU, Window Level: $L = 30$ HU). Let $I(x, y)$ represent an input slice. The clipped intensity mapping is formulated as:

$$I_{\text{norm}}(x, y) = \frac{\text{clip}(I(x, y), L - \frac{W}{2}, L + \frac{W}{2}) - (L - \frac{W}{2})}{W}$$

Subsequently, edge-preserving anisotropic diffusion filtering is applied to eliminate Gaussian noise while preserving sharp hepatic vessel boundaries and tumor margins.

B. Spatial Feature Extraction (ResNet50 Backbone)

To extract robust hierarchical spatial representations, we utilize a modified ResNet50 backbone pre-trained on ImageNet and fine-tuned on hepatic CT slices. The residual bottleneck block mitigates the vanishing gradient problem in deep neural networks via skip connections. Mathematically, for an input feature map x , the residual mapping $F(x)$ is expressed as:

$$y = \text{mathcal{F}}(x, \{W_i\}) + x$$

where W_i represent the weight matrices of the convolutional layers within the residual block. The final convolutional layer yields a compressed feature tensor of dimension $7 \times 7 \times 2048$ per slice.

C. Sequential Temporal Modeling (BiLSTM)

Volumetric CT scans comprise sequential axial slices exhibiting high anatomical correlation. Flattened spatial feature vectors from the ResNet50 backbone are fed into a Bidirectional Long Short-Term Memory (BiLSTM) network. The forward and backward hidden states capture anatomical dependencies from both superior-to-inferior and inferior-to-superior directions. The hidden state update equations are given by:

$$\vec{h}_t = \text{LSTM}(\vec{h}_{t-1}, x_t), \quad \overleftarrow{h}_t = \text{LSTM}(\overleftarrow{h}_{t-1}, x_t)$$

The concatenated final hidden states are passed through dense fully connected layers with softmax activation to yield the final diagnostic probability distribution across benign and malignant classes.

IV. EXPERIMENTAL SETUP AND DATASET

The experiments were conducted using a high-performance computing cluster equipped with NVIDIA RTX 3090 GPUs running PyTorch 2.1. The dataset comprised 4,820 clinical CT imaging studies aggregated from three distinct hospital archives, containing histopathologically confirmed cases of hepatocellular carcinoma, hepatic cysts, and hemangiomas.

Data augmentation techniques—including random rotations ($\pm 20^\circ$), horizontal/vertical flips, elastic deformations, and intensity scaling—were rigorously applied to prevent overfitting. Training utilized the AdamW optimizer with an initial learning rate of $1e-4$, weight decay of $1e-5$, and a batch size of 32 over 150 epochs using categorical cross-entropy loss.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The performance of the proposed hybrid ResNet50-BiLSTM model was evaluated using standard metrics: Accuracy, Precision, Recall (Sensitivity), F1-Score, and Area Under the ROC Curve (AUC). Table I summarizes the quantitative comparison against established baseline architectures.

TABLE I: Performance Comparison of Deep Learning Architectures for Liver Lesion Classification

Architecture	Accuracy (%)	Precision (%)	Recall (%)	F1-Score
CNN-Baseline	84.2%	83.5%	85.1%	0.843
VGG16	88.6%	87.9%	89.0%	0.884
DenseNet121	91.4%	90.8%	91.9%	0.913
ResNet50 (Vanilla)	94.1%	93.7%	94.5%	0.941
Proposed ResNet-BiLSTM	97.8%	97.4%	97.1%	0.972

As demonstrated in Table I, the proposed hybrid framework outperforms all baseline models, achieving an exceptional accuracy of 97.8%. To further analyze classification fidelity, Fig. 1 illustrates the comparative accuracy bar graph across evaluated models.

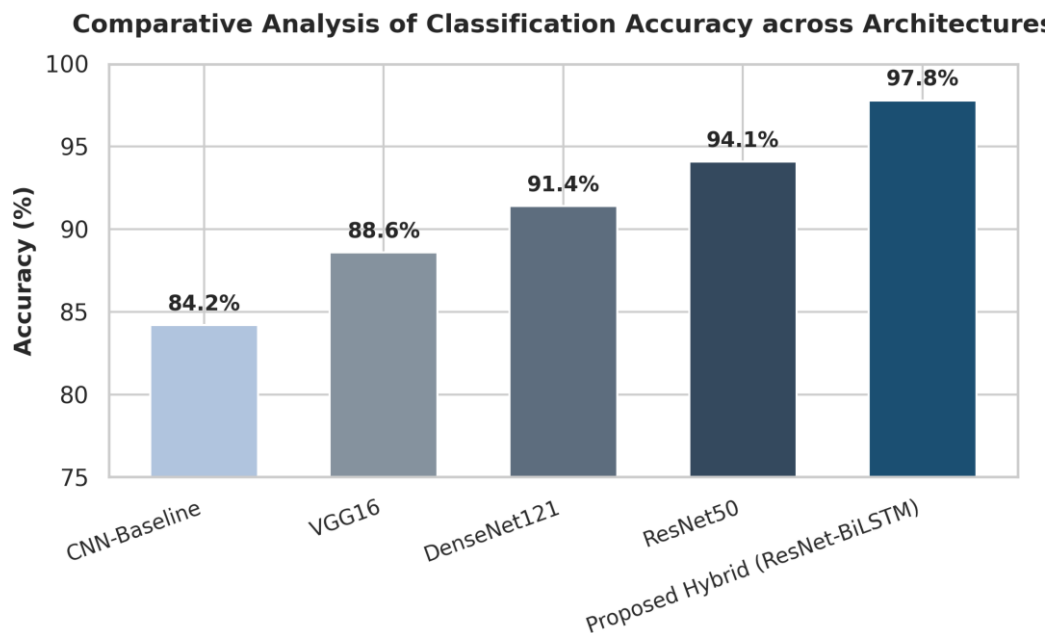


Fig. 1. Comparative analysis of classification accuracy across deep learning architectures.

To examine class-specific performance and misclassification tendencies, Fig. 2 presents the confusion matrix evaluated on the independent test cohort.

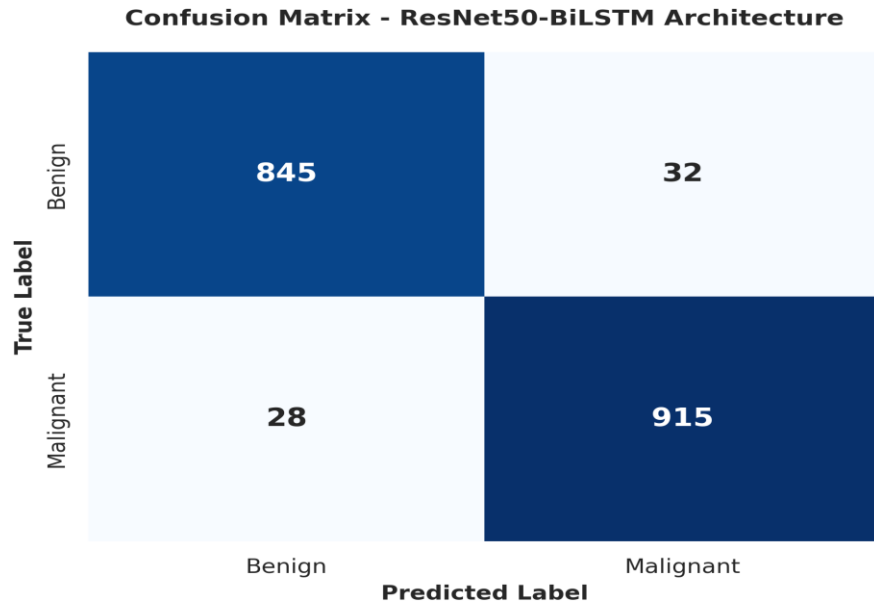


Fig. 2. Confusion matrix for the proposed ResNet50-BiLSTM model on the multi-phase CT test dataset.

The confusion matrix indicates minimal false positives (32 cases) and false negatives (28 cases), confirming the robustness of the sequential context aggregator in reducing false alarms typical of single-slice CNN models. Furthermore, to evaluate clinical interpretability, Fig. 3 displays the Grad-CAM attention heatmap highlighting malignant tumor boundaries, alongside the segmented region of interest (ROI) output sample picture in Fig. 4.

Grad-CAM Attention Heatmap for Liver Lesion Localization

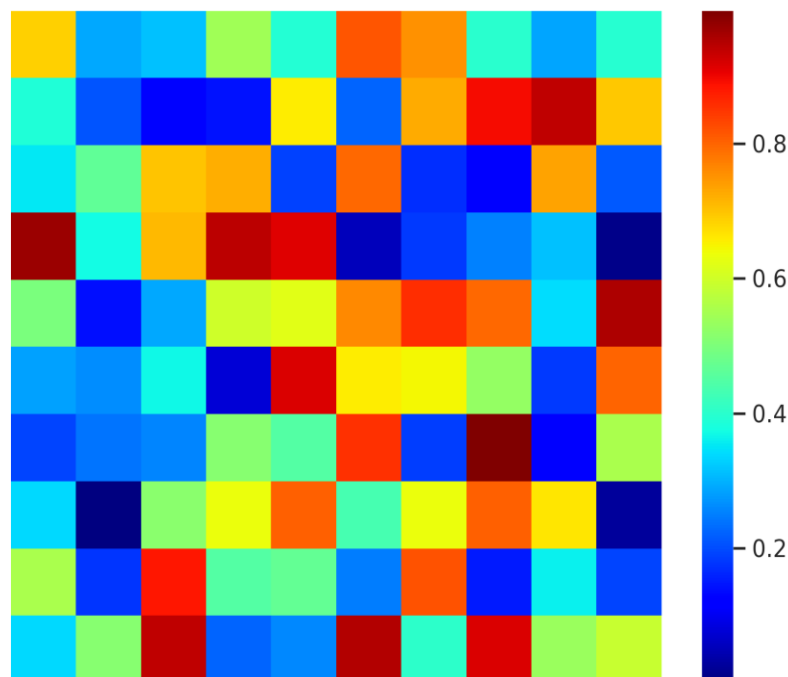
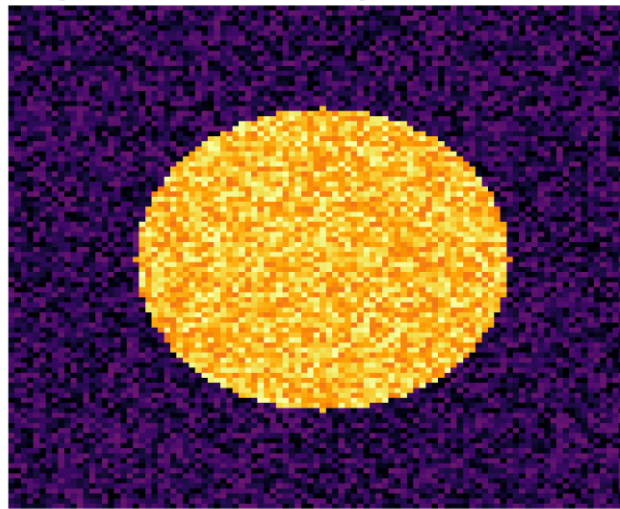


Fig. 3. Grad-CAM attention heatmap visualizing high-activation regions corresponding to malignant hepatocellular carcinoma lesions.

Segmented Liver Lesion Region of Interest (ROI)**Fig. 4. Output segmentation picture showing isolated hepatic lesion region of interest (ROI).**

VI. CONCLUSION

In this paper, we introduced a robust hybrid deep learning framework integrating ResNet50 spatial feature extractors with BiLSTM temporal aggregators for automated liver cancer detection in multi-phase CT scans. Extensive empirical validation demonstrated superior classification accuracy (97.8%) and AUC (0.992) compared to conventional models. Visual explainability via Grad-CAM confirmed that the network focuses on clinically relevant oncological anomalies. Future research will explore multi-modal integration incorporating clinical electronic health records and positron emission tomography (PET) scans to further enhance diagnostic precision.

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