US 20150043795A1

(19) United States

(12) Patent Application Publication

(10) Pub. No.: US 2015/0043795 A1

(43) Pub. Date: Feb. 12, 2015

RIGIE et al.

(54) **IMAGE DOMAIN PANSHARPENING METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR SPECTRAL CT WITH LARGE PIXEL ENERGY DISCRIMINATING DETECTORS**

(71) Applicants: **Toshiba Medical Systems Corporation**, Otawara-Shi (JP); **The University of Chicago**, Chicago, IL (US)

(72) Inventors: **David RIGIE**, CHICAGO, IL (US); **Patrick La RIVIERE**, CHICAGO, IL (US); **Adam PETSCHKE**, LAKE BLUFF, IL (US)

(21) Appl. No.: **13/960,819**

(22) Filed: **Aug. 7, 2013**

Publication Classification

(51) **Int. Cl.**

G06T 11/00	(2006.01)
G06T 5/00	(2006.01)
G06T 7/00	(2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC ***G06T 11/008*** (2013.01); ***G06T 7/0012*** (2013.01); ***G06T 11/003*** (2013.01); ***G06T 5/003*** (2013.01); *G06T 2207/10081* (2013.01); *G06T 2207/20172* (2013.01); *G06T 2207/30004* (2013.01); *G06T 2207/20208* (2013.01)

USPC **382/131**

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A hybrid CT dataset is obtained from a combination of a integrating detector and a photon-counting detector. The hybrid CT dataset contains low-resolution photon-counting data and high-resolution integrating data. High-resolution panchromatic images are generated from the high-resolution integrating data, and low-resolution spectral images are generated from the low-resolution photon-counting data. The high-resolution panchromatic images inherit the resolution properties of the integrating detector while the low-resolution spectral images inherit the spectral information of the photon-counting detector. Subsequently, the low resolution spectral images are pansharpened based upon at least one high resolution panchromatic image that lacks spectral information according to a pansharpening algorithm.

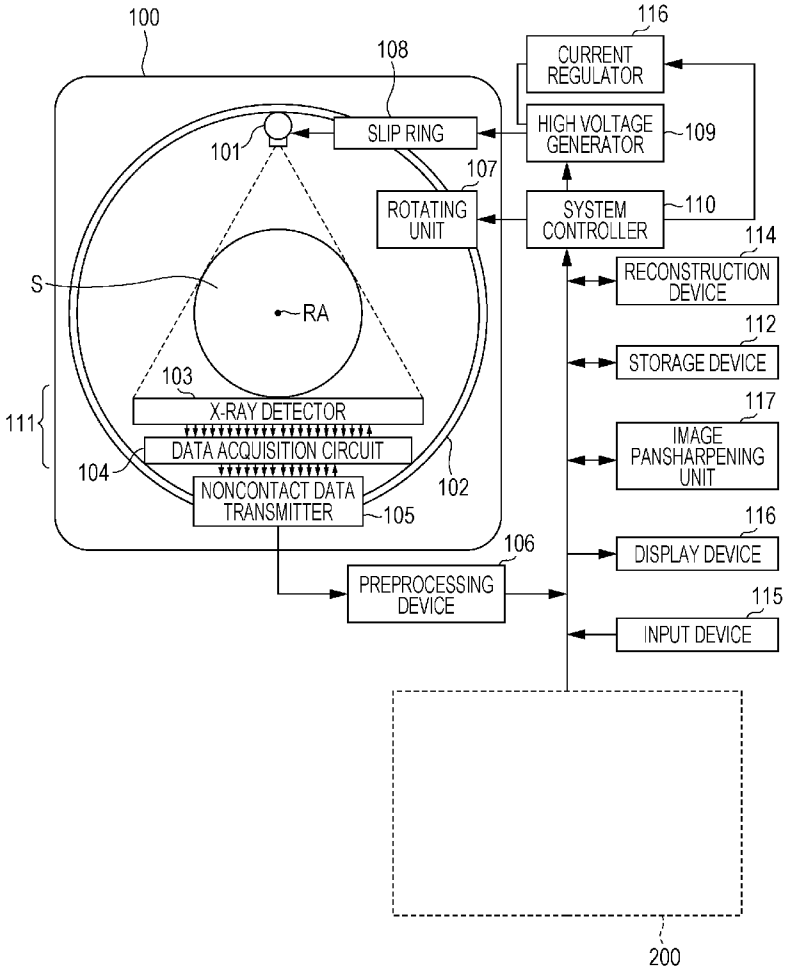


FIG. 1

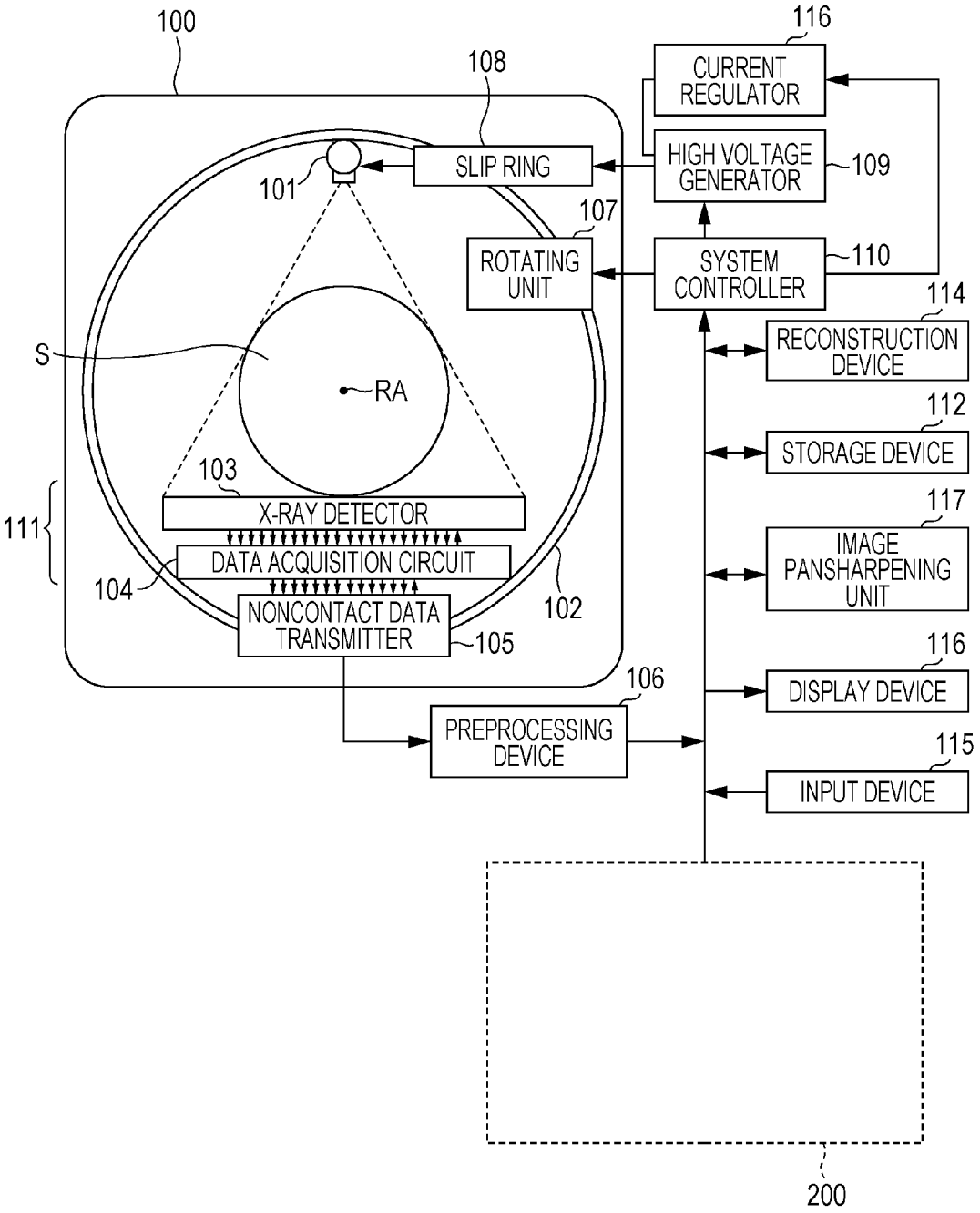

100
108
116
CURRENT REGULATOR
SLIP RING
HIGH VOLTAGE GENERATOR
109
101
107
ROTATING UNIT
SYSTEM CONTROLLER
110
114
RECONSTRUCTION DEVICE
S
RA
112
STORAGE DEVICE
103
X-RAY DETECTOR
117
IMAGE PANSHARPENING UNIT
111
DATA ACQUISITION CIRCUIT
104
102
NONCONTACT DATA TRANSMITTER
105
116
DISPLAY DEVICE
106
PREPROCESSING DEVICE
115
INPUT DEVICE
200

FIG. 2

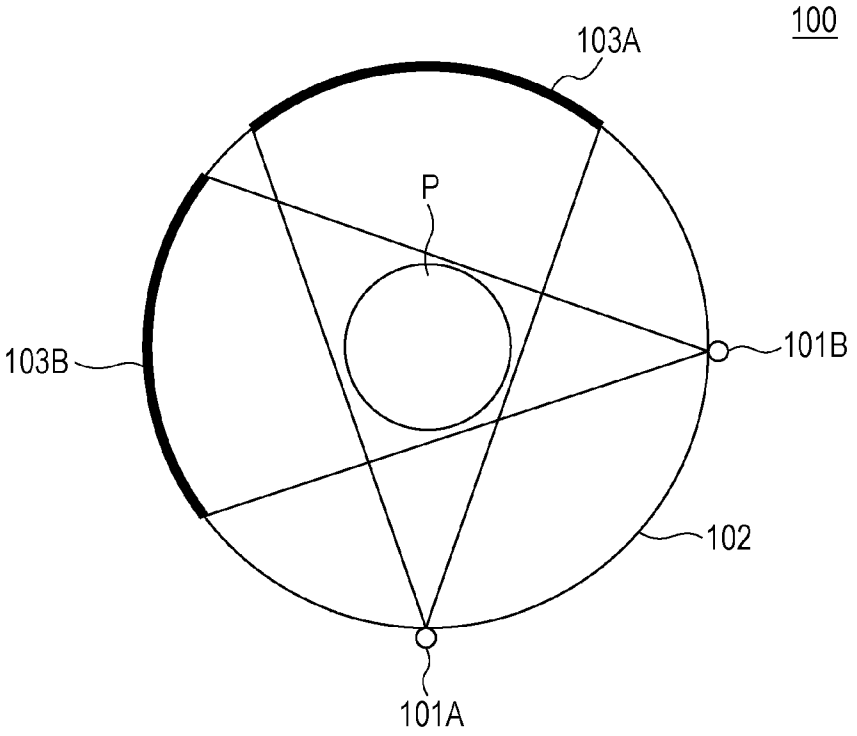


FIG. 3

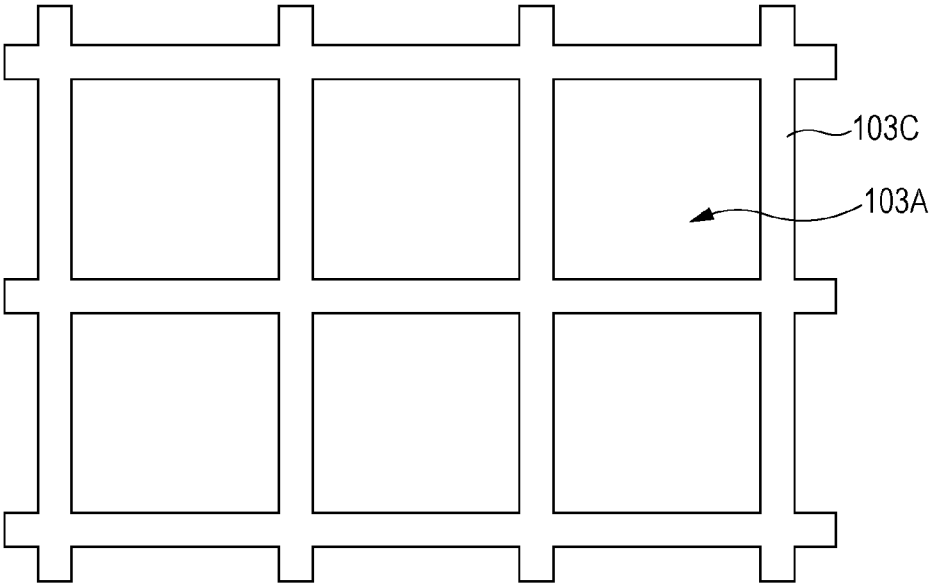


FIG. 4

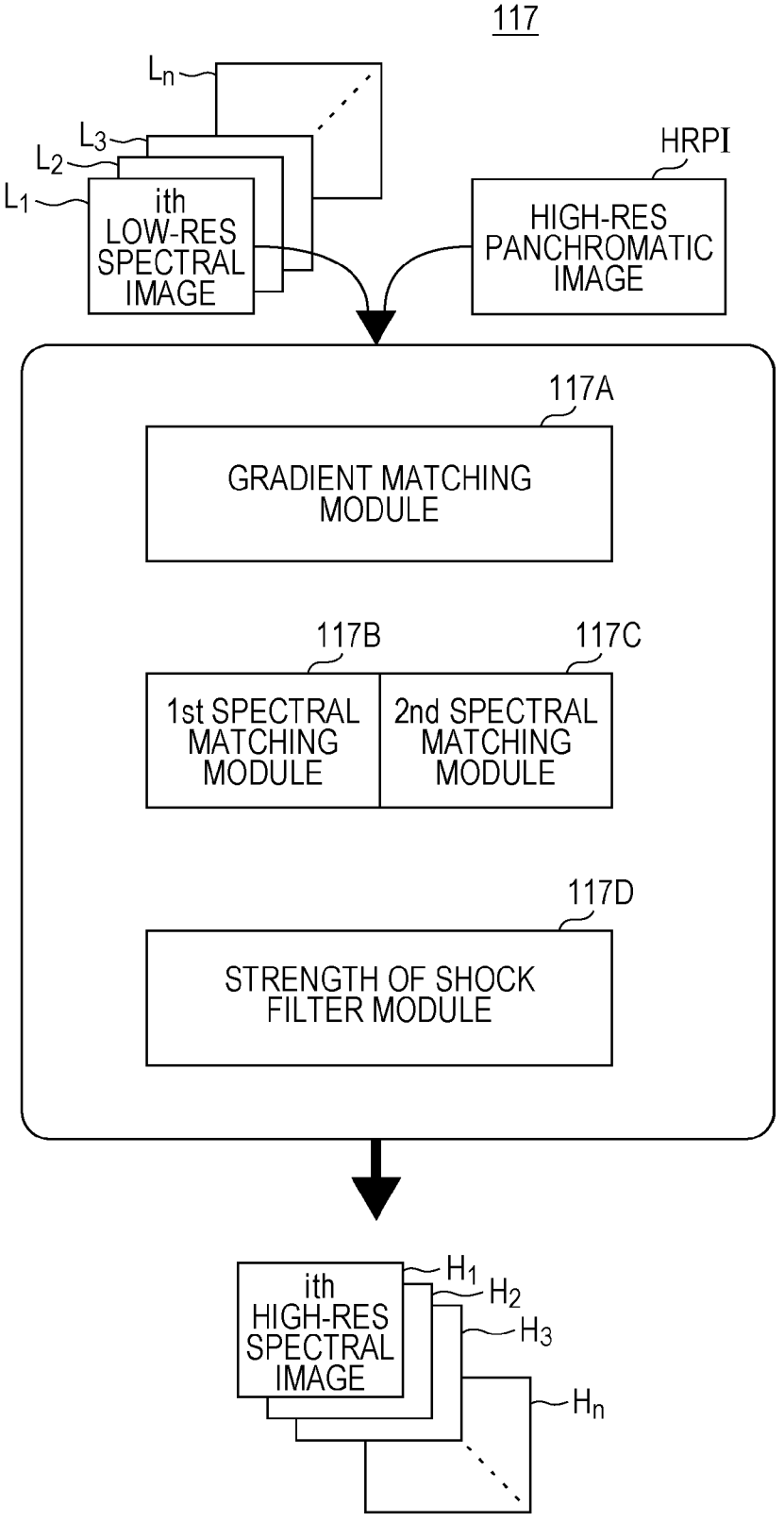

117
L_n
L_3
L_2
L_1
ith LOW-RES SPECTRAL IMAGE
HRPI
HIGH-RES PANCHROMATIC IMAGE
117A
GRADIENT MATCHING MODULE
117B
117C
1st SPECTRAL MATCHING MODULE
2nd SPECTRAL MATCHING MODULE
117D
STRENGTH OF SHOCK FILTER MODULE
ith HIGH-RES SPECTRAL IMAGE
H_1
H_2
H_3
H_n

FIG. 5

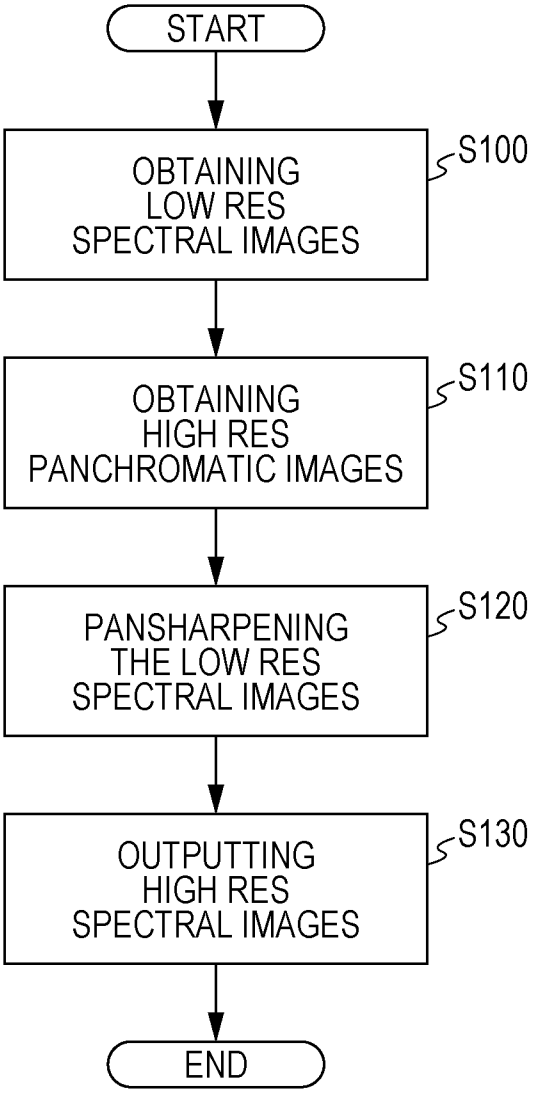

START
OBTAINING LOW RES SPECTRAL IMAGES
S100
OBTAINING HIGH RES PANCHROMATIC IMAGES
S110
PANSHARPENING THE LOW RES SPECTRAL IMAGES
S120
OUTPUTTING HIGH RES SPECTRAL IMAGES
S130
END

FIG. 6

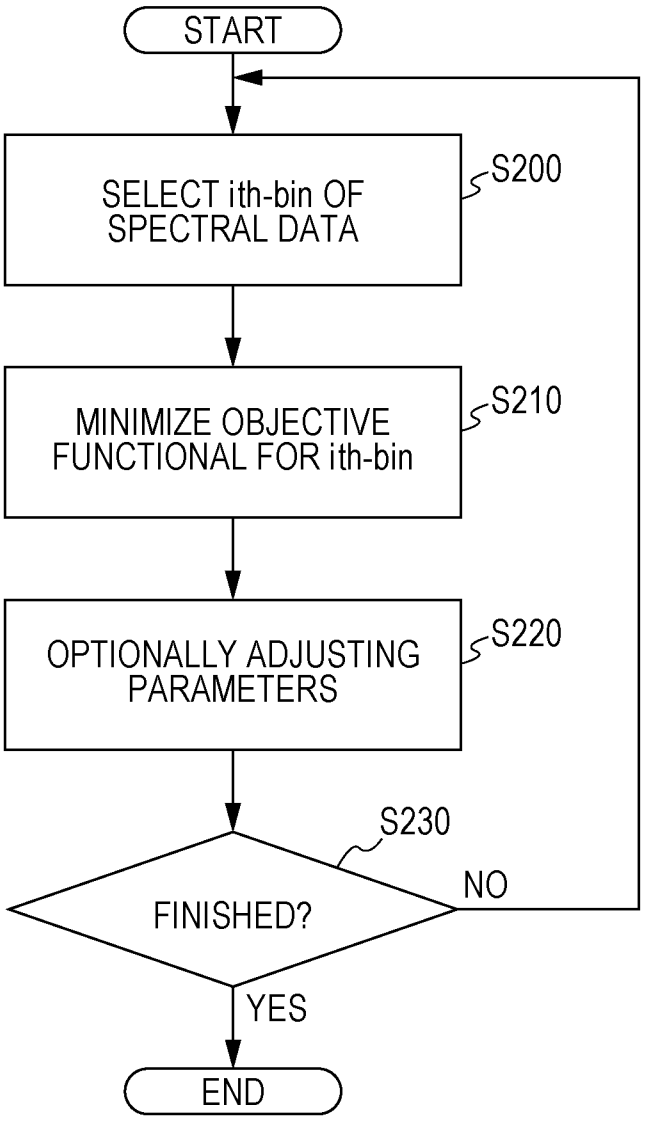

START
SELECT ith-bin OF SPECTRAL DATA
S200
MINIMIZE OBJECTIVE FUNCTIONAL FOR ith-bin
S210
OPTIONALLY ADJUSTING PARAMETERS
S220
S230
FINISHED?
NO
YES
END

FIG. 7A

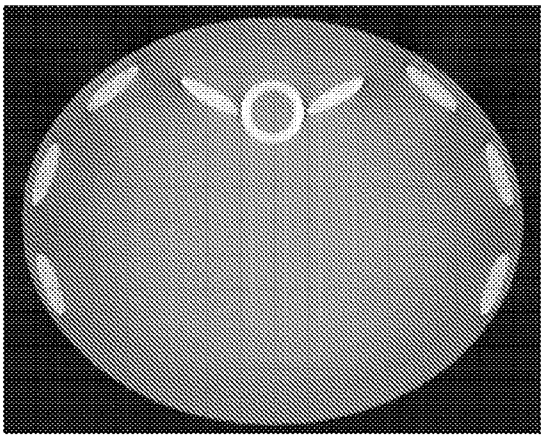


FIG. 7B

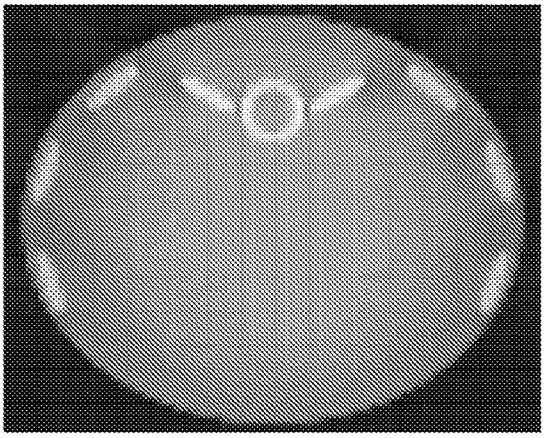


FIG. 7C

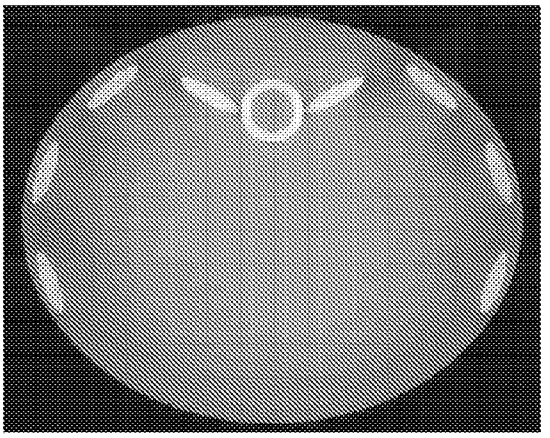
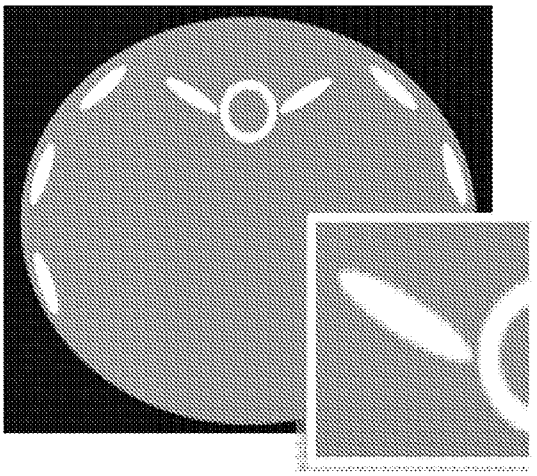
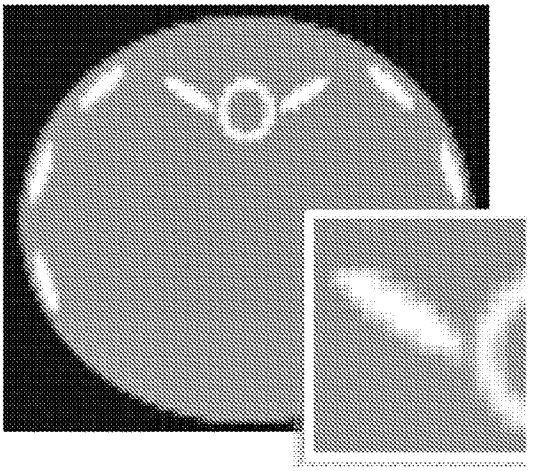


FIG. 8A



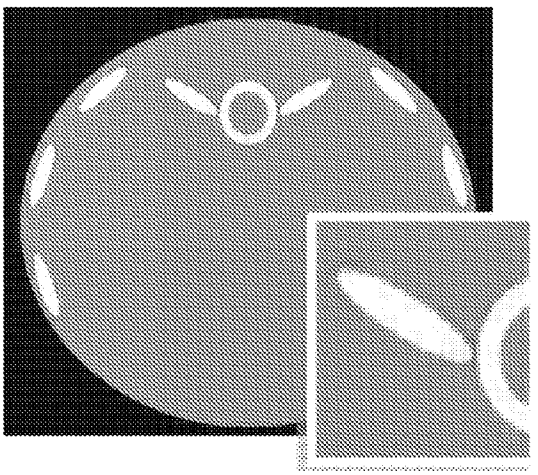
GROUND TRUTH – 512×512

FIG. 8B



INPUT IMAGE – 128×128

FIG. 8C



PAN-SHARPENED IMAGE

FIG. 9A

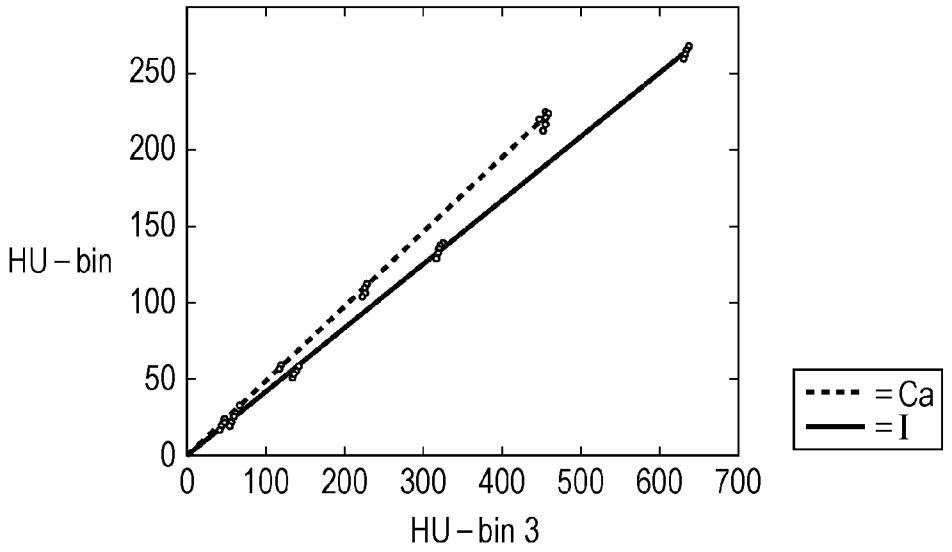

250
200
150
100
50
0
HU – bin
0
100
200
300
400
500
600
700
HU – bin 3
= Ca
= I

FIG. 9B

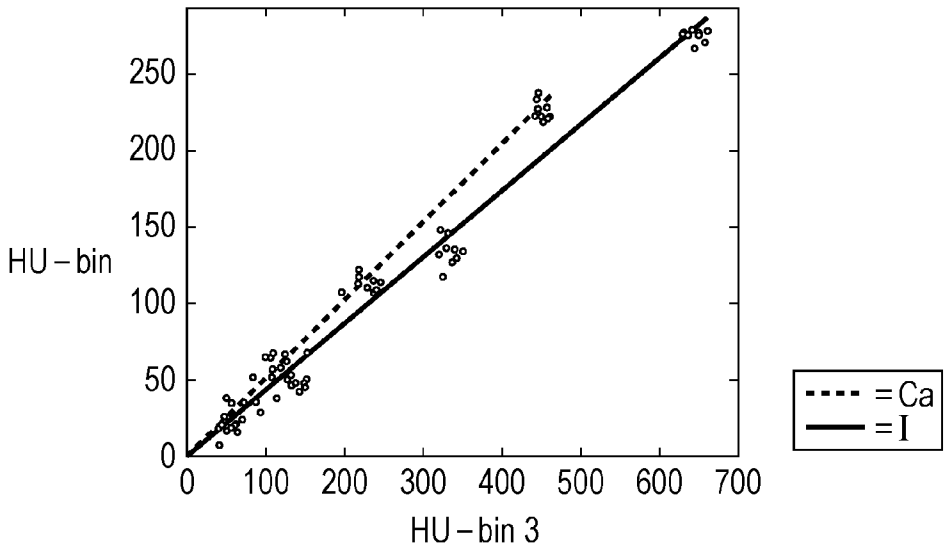

250
200
150
100
50
0
HU – bin
0
100
200
300
400
500
600
700
HU – bin 3
= Ca
= I

IMAGE DOMAIN PANSHARPENING METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR SPECTRAL CT WITH LARGE PIXEL ENERGY DISCRIMINATING DETECTORS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The current invention is generally related to computer tomography (CT) image processing, and more particularly related to pansharpening of CT low-resolution spectral images using a high-resolution panchromatic (non-spectral) image.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] There is great desire to incorporate photon-counting detectors also known as energy discriminating X-ray detectors in computed tomography (CT). The photon-counting detectors have some potential to improve image quality, reduce dose and enable new clinical applications of CT. The photon-counting detectors acquire data including extra spectral information for providing material classification, improving quantitative imaging and reducing beam-hardening artifacts.

[0003] Despite the above advantages over widely used energy-integrating detectors, the photon-counting detectors have certain disadvantages. The photon-counting detectors are generally limited by the high costs and their count-rate. Furthermore, although the signal-to-noise ratio (SNR) in the photon-counting detectors is reduced at low flux levels for a small pixel size, the photon-counting detectors experience an increased level of inter-pixel interference due to the small pixel size. On the other hand, the photon-counting detectors such as CdTe/CdZnTe sensors have poor performance at high flux levels, and consequently the SNR deteriorates. For these reasons, the photon-counting detectors have not yet replaced the energy-integrating detectors currently utilized in clinical CT systems.

[0004] Because of the above described issues of the photon-counting detectors, a dual-tube CT system has been proposed to utilize a combination of photon-counting detectors and integrating detectors. In one exemplary dual-tube CT system, one source projects X-ray towards a photon-counting detector while the other source projects X-ray towards a conventional detector that is placed at a predetermined angle with respect to the photon-counting detector. In order to cope with the high flux rates used in the exemplary dual-tube CT system, the pixel-size of the photon-counting detector was made substantially small, but charge sharing and K-escape rates have been increased to a point where the above described advantages of the photon-counting detector have substantially diminished.

[0005] Because of the above described prior art, there remains a desire to improve CT imaging using photon-counting detectors without suffering from the known disadvantages such as the high cost and the low sampling rate.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0006] FIG. **1** is a diagram illustrating one embodiment of the multi-slice X-ray CT apparatus or scanner for pansharpening a low-resolution spectral image according to the current invention.

[0007] FIG. **2** is a diagram illustrating a partial diagram of a hybrid photo counting CT in one embodiment for pansharpening a low-resolution spectral image according to the current invention.

[0008] FIG. **3** is a diagram illustrating a partial top view of a 2-D photon counting detector in one embodiment according to the current invention.

[0009] FIG. **4** is a diagram illustrating one embodiment of the image pansharpening unit according to the current invention.

[0010] FIG. **5** is a flow chart illustrating steps or acts involved in an exemplary process of pansharpening low-resolution spectral images to generate high-resolution spectral images based upon at least one high-resolution panchromatic image according to the current invention.

[0011] FIG. **6** is a flow chart illustrating steps or acts involved in more detailed aspects of the pansharpening step in one exemplary process according to the current invention.

[0012] FIG. **7**A is a 512×512 true image or a high-resolution panchromatic image of a predetermined phantom that has been reconstructed from non-spectral data which has been acquired at a certain energy-integrating detector of the CT system according to the current invention.

[0013] FIG. **7**B is a 128×128 low-resolution spectral image of the same predetermined phantom that has been reconstructed from spectral data which has been acquired in a first bin of a certain photon-counting detector of the CT system according to the current invention.

[0014] FIG. **7**C is a 512×512 high-resolution pansharpened spectral image of a predetermined phantom that has been generated from the high-resolution panchromatic image of FIG. **7**A and the low-resolution spectral image of FIG. **7**B based upon a predetermined pansharpening technique in the CT system according to the current invention.

[0015] FIG. **8**A is a 512×512 true image or a high-resolution panchromatic image of a predetermined phantom and a partial ROI image have been reconstructed from non-spectral data which has been acquired at a certain energy-integrating detector of the CT system according to the current invention.

[0016] FIG. **8**B is a 128×128 low-resolution spectral image and a partial ROI image of the same predetermined phantom that have been reconstructed from spectral data that has been acquired in the fourth energy bin (80-120 keV) of a certain photon-counting detector of the CT system according to the current invention.

[0017] FIG. **8**C is a high-resolution pansharpened spectral image and a partial ROI image that have been generated from the high-resolution panchromatic image of FIG. **8**A and the low-resolution spectral image of FIG. **8**B based upon a predetermined pansharpening technique in the CT system according to the current invention.

[0018] FIG. **9**A is a scatter plot depicting material classification of calcium and iodine with an angler separation of 3.5 degrees in the high-resolution pansharpened spectral image.

[0019] FIG. **9**B is the scatter plot depicting material classification of calcium and iodine with an angler separation of 3.3 degrees in the high-resolution photon-counting image.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT(S)

[0020] Referring now to the drawings, wherein like reference numerals designate corresponding structures throughout the views, and referring in particular to FIG. **1**, a diagram illustrates one embodiment of the multi-slice X-ray CT appa-

ratus or scanner for pansharpening a low-resolution spectral image according to the current invention including a gantry **100** and other devices or units. The gantry **100** is illustrated from a front view and further includes an X-ray tube **101**, an annular frame **102** and a multi-row or two-dimensional array type X-ray detector **103**. The X-ray tube **101** and X-ray detector **103** are diametrically mounted across a subject S on the annular frame **102**, which rotates around axis RA. Although a single pair of the X-ray tube **101** and X-ray detector **103** is illustrated in the diagram, the embodiment for pansharpening a low-resolution spectral image optionally includes more than a single pair of the X-ray tube **101** and X-ray detector **103**. A rotating unit **107** rotates the frame **102** at a high speed such as 0.4 sec/rotation while the subject S is being moved along the axis RA into or out of the illustrated page.

[0021] The multi-slice X-ray CT apparatus further includes a high voltage generator **109** that applies a tube voltage to the X-ray tube **101** so that the X-ray tube **101** generates X ray. In one embodiment, the high voltage generator **109** is mounted on the frame **102**. The X rays are emitted towards the subject S, whose cross sectional area is represented by a circle. The X-ray detector **103** is located at an opposite side from the X-ray tube **101** across the subject S for detecting the emitted X rays that have transmitted through the subject S.

[0022] Still referring to FIG. **1**, the X-ray CT apparatus or scanner further includes a data acquisition device **111** for detecting the emitted X rays and processing the detected signals. In one embodiment, the X-ray detector **103** is implemented using photon counting detectors for counting photons in each of a predetermined number of energy bins. Each of the energy bins defines a predetermined range of energy in the transmitted X-ray at the detector **103**. Furthermore, the X-ray detector **103** is implemented using a combination of photon-counting detectors and energy-integrating detectors. After detecting the emitted X rays at the X-ray detector **103**, a data acquisition circuit **104** converts a signal output from the X-ray detector **103** for each channel into a voltage signal, amplifies it, and further converts it into a digital signal. The X-ray detector **103** and the data acquisition circuit **104** are configured to handle a predetermined total number of projections per rotation (TPPR).

[0023] In one embodiment of pansharpening spectral images according to the current invention, the X-ray detector **103** includes a combination of photon-counting detectors and energy-integrating detectors. The photon-counting detectors detect low-resolution spectral data while the energy-integrating detectors detect high-resolution panchromatic (non-spectral) data. Although one exemplary configuration of the photon-counting detectors and the energy-integrating detectors will be illustrated in another embodiment with respect to FIG. **2**, the current invention as recited in the appended claims is not necessarily limited to a specific geometric configuration and includes variations.

[0024] The above described data is sent to a preprocessing device **106**, which is housed in a console outside the gantry **100** through a non-contact data transmitter **105**. The preprocessing device **106** performs certain corrections such as sensitivity correction on the raw data. A storage device or data storing unit **112** then stores the resultant data that is also called projection data at a stage immediately before reconstruction processing. The storage device **112** is connected to a system controller **110** through a data/control bus, together with an image reconstruction unit or device **114**, a display device **116**, an input device **115**, and a scan plan support apparatus **200**. The scan plan support apparatus **200** includes a function for supporting an imaging technician to develop a scan plan.

[0025] According to one aspect of the current invention, one embodiment of the image reconstruction device **114** reconstructs an image from the projection data that is stored in the storage device **112** based upon a predetermined reconstruction process such as a filtered backprojection (FBP) technique. In another embodiment, the reconstruction device **114** optionally reconstructs an image from the projection data based upon a filtered backprojection (FBP) technique with an additional feature of emulating a specific iteration result at a predetermined number of iterations according to a predetermined iterative reconstruction algorithm. In general, the reconstruction device **114** generates a high-resolution panchromatic (non-spectral) image from the projection data initially acquired by the energy integrating detectors as well as a low-resolution spectral image from the projection data initially acquired by the photon-counting detectors.

[0026] The reconstruction device **114** is implemented in a combination of software and hardware and is not limited to a particular implementation. In the following description of the reconstruction device **114**, the term, "unit" or "device" is inclusive of hardware and or software. Furthermore, the concept of the reconstruction device **114** is applicable to other modalities including nuclear medicine and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI).

[0027] One embodiment for pansharpening spectral images also includes an image pansharpening device or unit **117** according to the current invention. The image pansharpening unit **117** receives a high-resolution panchromatic image and at least one low-resolution spectral image and pansharpens at least the one low-resolution spectral image using the high-resolution panchromatic image based upon a predetermined technique to generate a high-resolution spectral image as a pansharpened image. In general, the predetermined technique involves a pansharpening algorithm that fuses high-resolution information into a low-resolution spectral image to generate a high-resolution spectral image.

[0028] Now referring to FIG. **2**, a diagram illustrates a partial diagram of a hybrid photo counting CT in one embodiment for pansharpening a low-resolution spectral image according to the current invention. The diagram illustrates the frame **102**, on which two pairs of a detector and an X-ray source are fixedly mounted in a predetermined configuration. For each of the two pairs, a detector and an X-ray source are diametrically placed across a patient P. A first pair includes a first X-ray source **101**A and a photon-counting detector **103**A while a second pair includes a second X-ray source **101**B and an energy-integrating detector **103**B. The first pair and the second pair are placed at a particular angle with each other in one embodiment. Furthermore, the photon-counting detector **103**A has a pixel size that is substantially larger than that of the energy-integrating detector **103**B. Both the first X-ray source **101**A and the second X-ray source **101**B are polychromatic in one embodiment according to the current invention.

[0029] FIG. **3** is a diagram illustrating a partial top view of a 2-D photon counting detector in one embodiment according to the current invention. An anti-scatter grid or collimator **103**C is placed over the photon counting detector such as a CZT/CdTe sensor **103**A for defining a pixel size. The pixel size of the photon-counting detector **103**A of FIG. **3** is substantially larger than that of the energy-integrating detector **103**B of FIG. **2**. That is, the photon-counting pixel size is two

to four times larger than the energy-integrating pixel size in one implementation. Furthermore, one implementation of the anti-scatter grid **103**C utilizes a grid thickness of at least about 200 microns in one implementation. The minimum thickness substantially minimizes the cross-talk interference of the adjacent ones of the detector elements in the photon counting detector **103**A. In general, the noise is consequently reduced in the above described implementations. On the other hand, collimation may be required to reduce flux to avoid pulse pileup in the above described implementations.

[0030] The configurations as illustrated in FIGS. **1**, **2** and **3** are mere illustrations for implementing the parts of a hybrid photon-counting CT in one embodiment in acquiring data for pansharpening a low-resolution spectral image based upon a high-resolution panchromatic image according to the current invention. To practice the current invention as recited in the claims, there are not necessarily specific requirements as to how the photon-counting detectors and the energy-integrating detector are employed to acquire low-resolution spectral data and high-resolution panchromatic data. By the same token, there are not necessarily specific requirements as to how the low-resolution spectral image and the high-resolution panchromatic image are generated from the low-resolution spectral data and the high-resolution panchromatic data. Lastly, there are not necessarily specific requirements as to how much larger the photon-counting pixel size should be with respect to the energy-integrating pixel size.

[0031] Now referring to FIG. **4**, a diagram illustrates one embodiment of the image pansharpening unit **117** according to the current invention. The image pansharpening unit **117** receives a predetermined number of images as inputs. In general, the image pansharpening unit **117** receives a set of low-resolution spectral images L1 through Ln, each corresponding to one of the predetermined bins of the photon-counting detectors. That is, each of the low-resolution images L1 through Ln has been reconstructed from the corresponding spectral data which was acquired at a particular bin of the photo-counting detectors. For example, if the photon-counting detector has a predetermined number of n bins, n low-resolution images L1 through Ln have been generated, and up to n low-resolution images are inputted into the image pansharpening unit **117** for being pansharpened to improve their resolution. At the same time, a single high-resolution panchromatic image HRPI is also inputted into the image pansharpening unit **117**. That is, the high-resolution panchromatic image HRPI has been reconstructed from data acquired at an energy-integrating detector. The image pansharpening unit **117** outputs a set of high-resolution spectral images H1 through Hn, each corresponding to one of the predetermined bins of the photon-counting detectors.

[0032] Still referring to FIG. **4**, the image pansharpening unit **117** further includes a gradient matching module **117**A, a first spectral matching module **117**B and a second spectral matching module **117**C for ultimately outputting a set of high-resolution spectral images H1 through Hn. In addition, the image pansharpening unit **117** optionally includes a strength shock filter module **117**D. In one implementation, at least some of the gradient matching module **117**A, the spectral matching modules **117**B, **117**C and the strength shock filter module **117**D are implemented as software modules. In another implementation, at least some of the gradient matching module **117**A, the spectral matching modules **117**B, **117**C and the strength shock filter module **117**D are implemented as a combination of software modules and hardware devices. To practice the current invention, additional requirements are not necessarily needed other than those as recited in the claims as to how the gradient matching module **117**A, the spectral matching modules **117**B, **117**C and the strength shock filter module **117**D are implemented.

[0033] In general, the gradient matching module **117**A, the first spectral matching module **117**B and the second spectral matching module **117**C are implemented based upon a predetermined algorithm as described by a predetermined equation such as Equation (1) below:

$$E(f_i) = \lambda_1 E_{gradient}(f_i) + \lambda_2 E_{radiometric}(f_i) + \lambda_3 E_{correlation}(f_i) \quad (1)$$

$$= \lambda_1 \int_\Omega |\nabla f_i - \alpha(\nabla I_{plan})\nabla I_{plan}|^2 dx +$$

$$\lambda_2 \sum_{j=1}^{n} \int_\Omega (f_j^2 - M_j^2)^2 dx + \lambda_3 \sum_{j=1}^{n} \int_\Omega (f_i M_j - f_j M_i)^2 dx$$

Wherein α is a predetermined coefficient, M_i is one of spectral images at a low resolution, I_{pan} is a panchromatic image at a high resolution, and f_i is a corresponding one of the pansharpened spectral images at a high resolution. That is, f_i is an objective functional to be minimized for optimization. Furthermore, an omega symbol just means the area to integrate over, and the whole image is integrated in the above case. f_j is summed over all j or all the images to include information from the other spectral images to substantially improve the quality of image f_i, the objective functional.

[0034] In one embodiment of the image pansharpening unit **117**, the gradient matching module **117**A performs the first term for resolution recovery as described in Equation (2),

$$\lambda_1 \int_\Omega |\nabla f_i - \alpha(\nabla I_{pan})\nabla I_{pan}|^2 dx \quad (2)$$

which encourages the injection of details from the panchromatic image. A predetermined first coefficient value $\lambda 1$ weighs the radiant matching term for resolution recovery and has an exemplary value of 0.1, 0.25, 0.5, 0.75 or 1.0.

[0035] By the same token, the first spectral matching module **117**B performs the second term for keeping gray levels faithful to the low-resolution images as described in Equation (3),

$$\lambda_2 \sum_{j=1}^{n} \int_\Omega (f_j^2 - M_j^2)^2 dx \quad (3)$$

which enforces matching of spectral characteristics with the multispectral images. The second term just matches the low resolution and the high resolution for one image at a time and then sums over all images. A predetermined second coefficient value $\lambda 2$ weighs the spectral matching term for keeping gray levels faithful to low-resolution images and has an exemplary value of 0.1, 0.25, 0.5, 0.75 or 1.0.

[0036] Optionally, the second spectral matching module **117**C performs the second term for keeping gray levels faithful to the low-resolution images as described in Equation (4),

$$\lambda_3 \sum_{j=1}^{n} \int_{\Omega} (f_i M_j - f_j M_i)^2 dx \quad (4)$$

Equation (4) enforces matching of spectral characteristics with the multispectral images. The third term is called a correlation term that matches different low-resolution images. For example, the first spectral bin is matched with the second spectral bin. In any case, both the first spectral matching module **117**B and the second spectral matching module **117**C substantially keep gray levels faithful to the high-resolution panchromatic image. A predetermined third coefficient value λ3 weighs the spectral matching term for keeping gray levels faithful to low-resolution images and has an exemplary value of 0.1, 0.25, 0.5, 0.75 or 1.0.

[0037] In this regard, another embodiment of the image pansharpening unit **117** fails to include or deactivates the second spectral matching module **117**C so that the image pansharpening unit **117** only includes the gradient matching module **117**A and the first spectral matching module **117**B. By deriving a first variation of the above functional, it is optionally minimized with a standard gradient descent algorithm as described in Equation (5).

$$\int E(f_i) = \lambda_1 \int_{\Omega} \|\nabla f_i - \alpha(\nabla I_{pan})\|^2 dxdy + \lambda_2 \int_{\Omega} (f_i - M_i)^2 dxdy \quad (5)$$

To reiterate some of the notations, M_i is one of the spectral images at a low resolution, I_{pan} is a panchromatic image at a high resolution, and f_i is a corresponding one of the pansharpended spectral images at a high resolution. That is, f_i is an objective functional to be minimized for optimization.

[0038] Yet in another embodiment, the strength shock filter module **117**D optionally performs the following term for promoting sharpening of an image as described in Equation (6),

$$\lambda_4 |\nabla f_i^k| \mathrm{sign}(\Delta f_i^k) dx \quad (6)$$

The above term is called an inverse diffusion term for sharpening an image in an updating equation such as steepest descent as shown in Equation (7). A predetermined fourth coefficient value λ4 weighs the inverse diffusion term for the strength of the shock filter.

$$\frac{f_i^{k+1} - f_i^k}{\Delta t} = \quad (7)$$

$$-2\lambda_1 (div(\alpha(\nabla I_{pan}) \nabla I_{pan}) - \Delta f_i^k) - 4\lambda_2 \sum_{j=1}^{n} \left((f_j^k)^2 - M_j^2\right) f_i^k -$$

$$2\lambda_3 \sum_{j=1}^{n} (f_i^k M_j - f_j^k M_i) M_j - \lambda_4 |\nabla f_i^k| \mathrm{sign}(\Delta f_i^k),$$

[0039] The above four predetermined coefficients λ1 through λ4 are used to weigh the relative emphasis among the four competing terms of the gradient matching module **117**A, the first spectral matching module **117**B, the second spectral matching module **117**C and the strength shock filter module **117**D for ultimately outputting a set of high-resolution spectral images H1 through Hn. Other embodiments of the image pansharpening unit **117** are not limited to the above described modules and optionally include other modules. In any case, the embodiments are implemented in a variety of ways to control these modules so that some or all of the modules are optionally operated in parallel.

[0040] Now referring to FIG. **5**, a flow chart illustrates steps or acts involved in an exemplary process of pansharpening low-resolution spectral images to generate high-resolution spectral images based upon at least one high-resolution panchromatic image according to the current invention. The exemplary process merely illustrates certain steps that are optionally combined into a single step or that are optionally further divided into sub-steps. To perform the current invention, the exemplary process is not necessarily limited to the illustrated steps or acts. In addition, each of the steps and acts does not necessarily correspond to a single unit or device and is optionally performed by more than a single unit or device.

[0041] Still referring to FIG. **5**, low-resolution spectral images are obtained in a step **S100**. In one embodiment, a predetermined number of low-resolution spectral images is reconstructed from corresponding spectral bin data that is initially acquired at certain photon-counting detectors such as CdTe/CdZnTe detectors. Although the low-resolution spectral images are reconstructed from spectral data as acquired at the photon-counting detectors in the embodiment, there are no limitations as to how the low-resolution spectral images are obtained in the step **S100** so long as these images are available for pansharpening.

[0042] By the same token, at least one high-resolution panchromatic image is obtained in a step **S110**. In one embodiment, at least one high-resolution panchromatic image is reconstructed from corresponding energy-integrating data that is initially acquired at certain energy-integrating detectors. Although the high-resolution panchromatic image is reconstructed from the integration data as acquired at the energy-integrating detector in the embodiment, there are no limitations as to how the high-resolution panchromatic image is obtained in the step **S110** so long as the image is available for pansharpening. Furthermore, the chronological sequence of the steps **S100** and **S110** is irrelevant to the claimed invention. In this regard, the steps **S100** and **S110** are optionally performed in parallel in the claimed invention.

[0043] Still referring to FIG. **5**, after a plurality of the low-resolution spectral images and at least the one high-resolution panchromatic image have been obtained, each of the low-resolution spectral images is pansharpened according to a predetermined technique such as one of the above algorithms based upon the high-resolution panchromatic image as well as other low-resolution spectral images in a step **S120**. The pansharpening step **S120** is not limited to a particular algorithm and possibly includes other variations of the above described pansharpening algorithms. According to one embodiment, one exemplary algorithm is performed by a certain combination of the gradient matching module **117**A, the first spectral matching module **117**B, the second spectral matching module **117**C and the strength shock filter module **117**D as illustrated in FIG. **4** for ultimately outputting a set of high-resolution spectral images H1 through Hn. The gradient matching module **117**A, the first spectral matching module **117**B, the second spectral matching module **117**C and the strength shock filter module **117**D respectively perform the various aspects of the pansharpening step **S120** as described by Equations (2), (3), (4) and (6).

[0044] Because of the above described features of the exemplary process, multiple sets of the high-resolution spectral images are optionally obtained based upon the selected pansharpening techniques. Furthermore, each of the high-

resolution spectral images is optionally obtained based upon a selected pansharpening technique according to particular needs in the region of interest (ROI). In other words, the selected pansharpening technique is not necessarily identical in pansharpening the multiple low-resolution spectral images in the step S**120**.

[0045] As a result of the pansharpening step S**120**, the high-resolution spectral images are outputted in a step S**130** according to the current invention. The outputting step S**130** is optionally sequential as one object functional f is minimized and the corresponding high-resolution spectral image is outputted in one exemplary process. In another exemplary process, the outputting step S**130** waits till all of the high-resolution spectral images are obtained. In any case, each of the high-resolution spectral images is outputted for use at the end of outputting step **130**.

[0046] After generally described with respect to the pansharpening step S**120** in FIG. **5**, more detailed aspects of the pansharpening step S**120** are further illustrated in FIG. **6** in one exemplary process according to the current invention. In one exemplary process, the pansharpening step S**120** further includes a step S**200** of selecting ith bin of the spectral data, a step S**210** of minimizing an object functional, a step S**220** of optionally adjusting parameters or weights and a step of determining as to whether or not every low-resolution spectral image is pansharpened.

[0047] Still referring to FIG. **6**, the selecting bin step S**200** selects a low-resolution spectral image corresponding to the ith bin of the spectral data that has been acquired at a predetermined photon-counting detector. In one embodiment, the ith bin is sequentially selected from 1 through nth bin by incrementing an index i by one. In another embodiment, the ith bin is optionally selected by a user based certain spectral information with respect to a particular material basis. For example, the five spectral images are obtained from the spectral data as acquired by the photo-counting detectors with 5 bins.

[0048] In the minimizing step S**210**, the objective functional is minimized for the selected low-resolution spectral image corresponding to the ith bin of the spectral data. As described above, the pansharpened images are found by minimizing the energy functional such as Equation (5) in one embodiment. In general, the use of pansharpening technique is computationally efficient than the use of an iterative technique for improving the low-resolution spectral image. On the other hand, the use of pansharpening technique is optionally combined with the use of an iterative technique in an alternative embodiment.

[0049] In the parameter adjusting step S**220**, certain predetermined parameters are optionally adjusted to further improve the quality of the spectral images during the pansharpening process according to the current invention. The optional parameters include the weights such as $\lambda 1$, $\lambda 2$, $\lambda 3$ and $\lambda 4$ as well as a as illustrated in Equation (1). In this regard, α is a predetermined coefficient. The predetermined first coefficient value $\lambda 1$ weighs the radiant matching term for resolution recovery and has an exemplary value of 0.1, 0.25, 0.5, 0.75 or 1.0. The predetermined second coefficient value $\lambda 2$ weighs the spectral matching term for keeping gray levels faithful to low-resolution images and has an exemplary value of 0.1, 0.25, 0.5, 0.75 or 1.0. The predetermined third coefficient value $\lambda 3$ weighs the spectral matching term for keeping gray levels faithful to low-resolution images and has an exemplary value of 0.1, 0.25, 0.5, 0.75 or 1.0. The parameter values are often empirically adjusted based upon the user input.

[0050] Lastly, it is determined as to whether or not the pansharpening process should be terminated according to the current invention. That is, it is generally determined whether or not every one of the low-resolution spectral images of interest has been pansharpened according to a predetermined technique in the steps S**200** through S**210**. If it is determined in the step S**230** that every one of the low-resolution spectral images has been pansharpened, the exemplary pansharpening process terminates itself. On the other hand, if it is determined in the step S**230** that not every one of the low-resolution spectral images has been pansharpened, the exemplary pansharpening process continues by repeating from the selecting step S**200**.

[0051] Now referring to FIGS. **7**A, **7**B and **7**C, images illustrate an exemplary result of a pansharpened image according to the current invention. FIG. **7**A is a 512×512 true image or a high-resolution panchromatic image of a predetermined phantom that has been reconstructed from non-spectral data which has been acquired at a certain energy-integrating detector of the CT system according to the current invention. Although a single image is illustrated in the example, a plurality of the high-resolution panchromatic images is optionally utilized according tot the current invention. The high-resolution panchromatic image has been reconstructed based upon a predetermined reconstruction algorithm.

[0052] FIG. **7**B is a 128×128 low-resolution spectral image of the same predetermined phantom that has been reconstructed from spectral data which has been acquired in a first bin of a certain photon-counting detector of the CT system according to the current invention. Although a single image is illustrated in the example, a plurality of the low-resolution spectral images is optionally utilized according tot the current invention. The low-resolution spectral image has been reconstructed based upon a predetermined reconstruction algorithm. In this regard, the same predetermined reconstruction algorithm is used to reconstruct the high-resolution panchromatic image and the low-resolution spectral image in one embodiment. On the other hand, a different predetermined reconstruction algorithm is optionally used between the high-resolution panchromatic image and the low-resolution spectral image in another embodiment.

[0053] FIG. **7**C is a 512×512 high-resolution pansharpened spectral image of the same predetermined phantom that has been generated from the high-resolution panchromatic image of FIG. **7**A and the low-resolution spectral image of FIG. **7**B based upon a predetermined pansharpening technique in the CT system according to the current invention. The high-resolution pansharpened spectral image has been generated based upon a predetermined pansharpening algorithm which is selected from a group of pansharpening algorithms that includes certain variations including various terms as described above in Equations (1) through (6). The spectral image as illustrated in FIG. **7**C has substantially improved its resolution over the low-resolution spectral image of FIG. **7**B while it maintains its spectral characteristics. In addition, a plurality of high-resolution pansharpened spectral images is optionally generated according to the current invention.

[0054] Now referring to FIGS. **8**A, **8**B and **8**C, a region of interest (ROI) is substantially improved based upon a predetermined pansharpening technique in the CT system according to the current invention. One of the exemplary phantoms

represents an axial slice through the abdomen and contains ellipses made of bone, liver, water and muscle. In general, the pan-sharpened images from each of the energy bins of the photon counting detector have substantially recovered nearly all of the resolution of the ground-truth or the high-resolution panchromatic image with some minor exceptions of spectral distortion in the high contrast objects. FIG. **8** illustrates the improvement in a particular ROI in the low-resolution image from a particular energy bin.

[0055] Still referring to FIG. **8**A, a 512×512 true image or a high-resolution panchromatic image of a predetermined phantom and a partial ROI image have been reconstructed from non-spectral data which has been acquired at a certain energy-integrating detector of the CT system according to the current invention. Although a single ROI image is illustrated in the example, a plurality of ROI images is optionally utilized according tot the current invention. The high-resolution panchromatic image has been reconstructed based upon a predetermined reconstruction algorithm. In a lower right corner, a partial high-resolution panchromatic image has been selected from a predetermined ROI.

[0056] FIG. **8**B is a 128×128 low-resolution spectral image and a partial ROI image of the same predetermined phantom that have been reconstructed from spectral data that has been acquired in the fourth energy bin (80-120 keV) of a certain photon-counting detector of the CT system according to the current invention. Although a single image is illustrated in the example, a plurality of the low-resolution spectral images is optionally utilized according tot the current invention. The low-resolution spectral image has been reconstructed based upon a predetermined reconstruction algorithm. In this regard, the same predetermined reconstruction algorithm is used to reconstruct the high-resolution panchromatic image and the low-resolution spectral image in one embodiment. On the other hand, a different predetermined reconstruction algorithm is optionally used between the high-resolution panchromatic image and the low-resolution spectral image in another embodiment. In a lower right corner, a partial low-resolution spectral image has been selected from the same predetermined ROI.

[0057] FIG. **8**C is a high-resolution pansharpened spectral image and a partial ROI image that have been generated from the high-resolution panchromatic image of FIG. **8**A and the low-resolution spectral image of FIG. **8**B based upon a predetermined pansharpening technique in the CT system according to the current invention. The high-resolution pansharpened spectral image has been generated based upon a predetermined pansharpening algorithm which is selected from a group of pansharpening algorithms that includes certain variations including various terms as described above in Equations (1) through (6). The spectral image as illustrated in FIG. **8**C has substantially improved its resolution over the low-resolution spectral image of FIG. **8**B while it maintains its spectral characteristics. In a lower right corner, a partial high-resolution spectral ROI image has been selected from the same predetermined ROI. Alternatively, a high-resolution pansharpened spectral ROI image has been generated according to a predetermined pansharpening technique based upon the high-resolution panchromatic ROI image and the low-resolution spectral ROI image. In addition, a plurality of high-resolution pansharpened spectral ROI images is optionally generated according to the current invention.

[0058] Now referring to FIG. **9**, a pair of graphs depicts how an exemplary pansharpening process according to the current invention affects material classification. Using a predetermined material classification phantom containing disks of various iodine and calcium concentrations, an exemplar pansharpening process fails to affect material classification tasks as depicted by the scatter plots from ROI's in the different disks. From the scatter plots, material classification is largely unaffected by the exemplary pansharpening process according to the current invention.

[0059] Now referring to FIG. **9**A, the scatter plot depicts material classification of calcium and iodine with an angler separation of 3.5 degrees in the high-resolution pansharpened spectral image. The x axis is a HU value in the third energy bin while the y axis is a HU value in the fourth energy bin. Furthermore, a solid line indicates iodine while a dotted line indicates calcium. Both the material classifications of calcium and iodine are substantially linear between the third and fourth bins in the high-resolution pansharpened spectral image after the exemplary pansharpening process according to the current invention.

[0060] Now referring to FIG. **9**B, the scatter plot depicts material classification of calcium and iodine with an angler separation of 3.3 degrees in the high-resolution photon-counting image. The x axis is a HU value in the third energy bin while the y axis is a HU value in the fourth energy bin. Furthermore, a solid line indicates iodine while a dotted line indicates calcium. Both the material classifications of calcium and iodine are substantially linear between the third and fourth bins in high-resolution photon-counting image before the exemplary pansharpening process according to the current invention. As a result of comparison between the two scatter plots in FIGS. **9**A and **9**B, material classification of calcium and iodine is largely unaffected the third and fourth bins by the exemplary pansharpening process according to the current invention.

[0061] It is to be understood, however, that even though numerous characteristics and advantages of the present invention have been set forth in the foregoing description, together with details of the structure and function of the invention, the disclosure is illustrative only, and that although changes may be made in detail, especially in matters of shape, size and arrangement of parts, as well as implementation in software, hardware, or a combination of both, the changes are within the principles of the invention to the full extent indicated by the broad general meaning of the terms in which the appended claims are expressed.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of improving a spectral image, comprising;

reconstructing a high-resolution panchromatic image based upon energy integration data from energy integrating detectors;

reconstructing at least one low-resolution spectral image based upon spectral energy data from photon counting detectors; and

pansharpening at least the one low-resolution spectral image using the high-resolution panchromatic image to generate a high-resolution spectral image as a pansharpened image.

2. The method of improving a spectral image according to claim **1** further comprising an additional steps of:

acquiring the energy integration data at the energy integrating detectors having a second detector element size;

acquiring the spectral energy data at the photon counting detectors having a first detector element size that is larger than the second detector element size.

3. The method of improving a spectral image according to claim **2** wherein said acquiring the spectral energy data utilizes a first flux level that is lower than a second flux level that is used for said acquiring the energy integration data.

4. The method of improving a spectral image according to claim **2** wherein said acquiring the spectral energy data and said acquiring the energy integration data utilize two separate sources.

5. The method of improving a spectral image according to claim **1** further comprising an additional step of iteratively reconstructing an image using the high-resolution spectral image as a seed image.

6. The method of improving a spectral image according to claim **1** wherein said pansharpening uses a predetermined algorithm as described by

$$\int E(f_i)=\lambda_1\int_\Omega\|\nabla f_i-\alpha(\nabla I_{pan})\|^2dxdy+\lambda_2\int_\Omega(f_i-M_i)^2dxdy$$

where I_{pan} is the panchromatic image, M_i is i'th channel of the low-resolution spectral image, and f_i is the i'th channel of the pansharpened image.

7. A system for improving a spectral image, comprising;

energy integrating detectors for acquiring energy integration data;

photon counting detectors for acquiring spectral energy data;

a data storing unit for storing the energy integration data and the spectral energy data;

an image reconstruction unit connected to said data storing unit for reconstructing a high-resolution panchromatic image from the energy integration data and reconstructing at least one low-resolution spectral image from the spectral energy data; and

an image pansharpening unit connected to said image reconstruction unit for pansharpening the low-resolution spectral image using the high-resolution panchromatic image to generate at least one high-resolution spectral image.

8. The system for improving a spectral image according to claim **7** wherein said photon counting detectors have a first detector element size that is smaller than a second detector element size of said energy integrating detectors, the first detector element size being effectively combined to have a third element size that is larger than the second detector element size.

9. The system for improving a spectral image according to claim **7** wherein said photon counting detectors have a first detector element size that is larger than a second detector element size of said energy integrating detectors.

10. The system for improving a spectral image according to claim **7** wherein said photon counting detectors utilize a first flux level that is lower than a second flux level that is used for said energy integration detectors.

11. The system for improving a spectral image according to claim **10** further comprising a first source for said photon counting detectors and a second source for energy integration detectors.

12. The system for improving a spectral image according to claim **11** wherein said first source and said second source are located at a predetermined angle along the predetermined trajectory.

13. The system for improving a spectral image according to claim **7** wherein said image reconstruction unit iteratively reconstructs an image using the high-resolution spectral image as a seed image.

14. The system for improving a spectral image according to claim **7** wherein said image pansharpening unit for pansharpening according to a predetermined algorithm as described by

$$\int E(f_i)=\lambda_1\int_\Omega\|\nabla f_i-\alpha(\nabla I_{pan})\|^2dxdy+\lambda_2\int_\Omega(f_i-M_i)^2dxdy \quad (5)$$

where I_{pan} is the panchromatic image, M_i is the i'th channel of the low-resolution spectral image, and f_i is the i'th channel of the pansharpened image.

15. A system for improving a spectral image, comprising;

energy integrating detectors in a first predetermined detector size for acquiring energy integration data;

photon counting detectors in with a second predetermined detector size with thick anti-scatter grids for acquiring spectral energy data, the second predetermined detector size being substantially larger than the first predetermined detector size;

a data storing unit for storing the energy integration data and the spectral energy data;

an image reconstruction unit connected to said data storing unit for reconstructing a high-resolution panchromatic image from the energy integration data and reconstructing at least one low-resolution spectral image from the spectral energy data; and

an image pansharpening unit connected to said image reconstruction unit for pansharpening the low-resolution spectral image using the high-resolution panchromatic image to generate at least one high-resolution spectral image.

* * * * *