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# Recent advances in using Chinese Earth observation satellites for remote sensing of vegetation

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## Abstract

Vegetation is an important component of the Earth system as it supports other terrestrial biological activities through the photosynthetic production. The biophysical and biochemical parameters of vegetation retrieved from satellite observations have been used extensively in global vegetation monitoring and Earth system modeling. So far, most of vegetation remote sensing applications used data from sensors onboard satellites from American or European space agencies. From the user perspective, it would be beneficial to have an even more diverse data sources that can secure data sustainability in case of satellite retirement or sensor failure and enables research opportunities such as multi-sensor data fusion/integration and multi-angle remote sensing. In this regard, it would be worth exploring the potential of the Chinese Earth Observation Satellites (CEOS) for monitoring vegetation dynamics and for understanding Earth system functioning in general from space. Here

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we summarized the recent advances in applying CEOS data to retrieve several key vegetation parameters widely used in geoscience field. We focused on the uncertainty and limitations by critically examining the case studies conducted over different vegetation types. Suggestions for research opportunities that can benefit from the combined use of data from the CEOSs as well as other international spaceborne sensors are also provided. The hope is to provide the community an overview of what could be useful to their specific geoscientific, environmental and global change studies by leveraging the growing data volume from the orbiting and the planned CEOS sensors.

**Keywords:** remote sensing of vegetation, Earth system dynamics, global change, multi-sensor fusion, data continuity

## 1 Introduction

Vegetation remote sensing refers to the retrieval of biochemical and biophysical parameters of vegetation using satellite observations (Aplin 2005). Commonly used vegetation parameters include vegetation indices (VIs), leaf area index (LAI), fractional vegetation cover (FVC), aboveground biomass (AGB) and sun-induced chlorophyll fluorescence (SIF) (Cohen and Goward 2004; Kerr and Ostrovsky 2003; Wulder et al. 2004). These parameters have been widely used as a diagnostic proxy as well as inputs to prediction models in the fields of geoscience, agriculture, ecology, environmental science, and global change (Gianelle et al. 2009; Nara and Sawada 2021; Pettorelli et al. 2005).

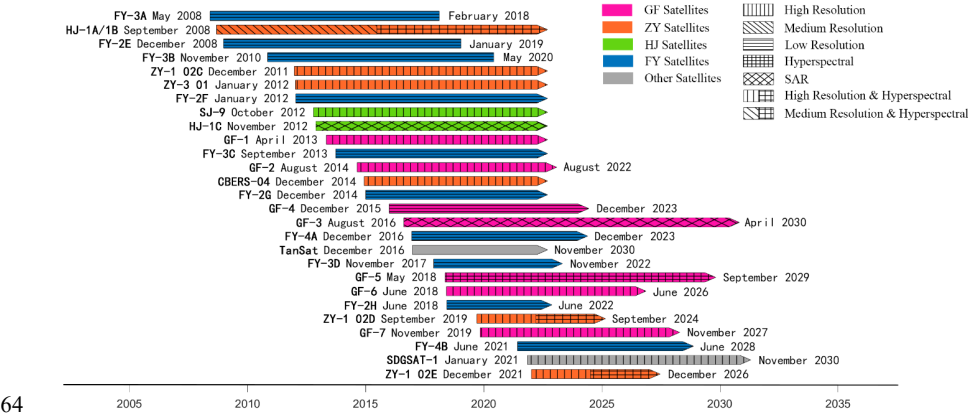
Over past few decades, the field of remote sensing of vegetation witnessed rapid advances and enormous successes. A large credit should be given to the significant amount of investment, usually

40 from state governments, to the satellite sensors that eventually enabled global monitoring of  
41 vegetation dynamics and associated geoscientific applications. Spaceborne sensors such as AVHRR  
42 (Advanced Very-High-Resolution Radiometer), MODIS (Moderate-resolution Imaging  
43 Spectroradiometer) and ETM+ (Enhanced Thematic Mapper plus), have acquired a huge amount of  
44 science-quality data that led to a surge of applications in vegetation remote sensing (Davis et al.  
45 2017; Liu et al. 2018; Mancino et al. 2020; Zhang et al. 2017; Zhou et al. 2018; Zoungrana et al.  
46 2018).

47 Recently, China has started launching more and more Earth Observation satellites that carry  
48 instruments including multispectral, hyperspectral sensors and Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR), in  
49 together termed as the Chinese Earth Observation Satellites (CEOSs) (Figure 1). There have been  
50 many studies using data from CEOSs for retrieving vegetation parameters. A systemic review on  
51 the potential and limitations of the sensors onboard CEOSs for remote sensing of vegetation,  
52 however, is not available yet. To what extent do the CEOS sensors' specifications and performance  
53 resemble the industry-standard sensors such as MODIS or ETM+/OLI? What are the accuracies for  
54 retrieving several commonly-used vegetation parameters from the CEOS sensors in different  
55 ecosystem types? What multi-sensor research opportunities are enabled by adding CEOSs?  
56 Answering these questions would be useful for the end-users to better use the data from CEOSs in  
57 their specific studies. This review aims to provide the community a summary of the recent advances  
58 in using CEOS sensors for vegetation remote sensing and its associated applications. To make this  
59 review reach a broader international community, most of the literature cited in this review are  
60 published in English journals, with the remaining published in Chinese journals at least contain

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62 abstracts written in English. In addition, the weblinks to the data portals of CEOSs with English  
63 language support are also provided.



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65 **Figure 1** Timelines of several major CEOSs (FY: FengYun Meteorological Satellites; GF: GaoFen Satellites; ZY:  
66 ZiYuan Satellites; HJ: HuanJing satellites; SJ: ShiJian satellites; SDGSAT: Sustainable Development Goals  
67 Satellite; TanSat: Global CO<sub>2</sub> observation and monitoring satellite)

68 **2 Overview on specifications of the CEOS sensors**

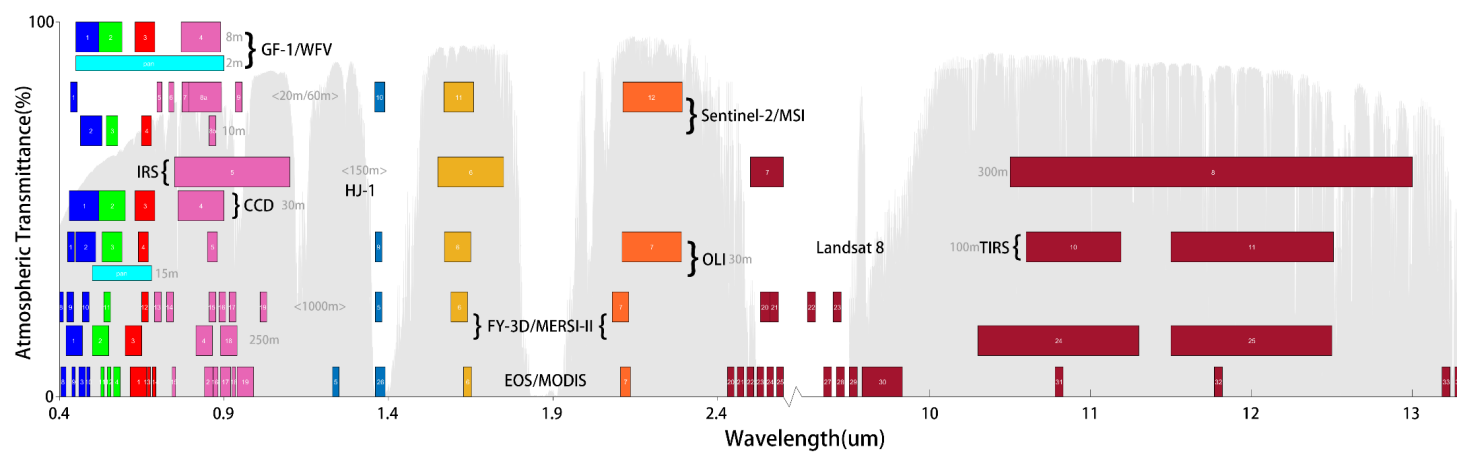
69 At present, there are five major CEOS constellations that have the potential to be used for  
70 vegetation remote sensing, including GaoFen, HuanJing/ShiJian, ZiYuan, FengYun and TanSat.  
71 Sensors onboard these satellites include panchromatic, visible, multispectral, hyperspectral to  
72 Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR), with data recorded at different spatial resolutions (submeter to  
73 kilometer). Table 1 summarizes the specifications of above five CEOS constellations and Figure 2  
74 compares the spectral band configurations between the optical sensors onboard CEOSs and other  
75 international satellites.

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Commented [张1]: Table 1 is the specifications of GF satellites.

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80 **Figure 2** Comparisons in spectral band configurations between optical sensors onboard the CEOSs and other international satellites. Each bar represents a single band

81 the width of the bar indicates bandwidth. The number on the bar indicates the band number. Spatial resolution of each band is indicated with grey-colour text. The

82 background shows the atmospheric transmittance of the 1976 U.S. standard atmosphere.

83 **2.1 GaoFen Satellites**

84 GaoFen (GF in acronym, or “High-resolution”) is a series of Chinese high-resolution Earth imaging  
85 satellites, which is part of the state-sponsored Chinese High-resolution Earth Observation System  
86 (CHEOS) program. GF-1 is the first satellite of GF series, and was launched on April 26, 2013,  
87 with an [expected lifetime](#) of 5-8 years. It carries 4 Wide-Field View multispectral sensors (WFV)  
88 with 16 m resolution, and a Panchromatic / Multispectral sensor (PMS) with 2 m spatial resolution  
89 in panchromatic mode and 8 m spatial resolution in multispectral mode. To date, there have been  
90 four nearly identical GF-1 launched into orbits, all can provide high spatial and temporal resolution  
91 multispectral measurements. GaoFen-6 (GF-6) is another multispectral satellite launched on June 2,  
92 2018, with [an expected lifetime](#) of 8 years. Equipped with the WFV and PMS sensors similar to  
93 GF-1, GF-6 also adds a "red edge" band to capture the unique spectral characteristics of crops. GF-  
94 1/6 WFV and PMS sensors are similar to Sentinel-2/MSI and SPOT-6(7)/NAOMI, respectively  
95 (Appendix Table A1 and A2).

96 GaoFen-2 (GF-2) was launched on August 19, 2014, with [an expected lifetime](#) of 5-8 years. It  
97 carries a PMS with the spatial resolution of 0.8 m in panchromatic mode and 3.2 m in multispectral  
98 mode, and is the first Chinese sub-meter spatial resolution satellite (Huang et al. 2018; Pan 2015).  
99 GF-2/PMS is similar to QuickBird and WorldView satellites (Appendix Table A3).

100 GaoFen-3 (GF-3) is a SAR constellation consisting of three satellites, i.e. GF-3 01, GF-3 02 and  
101 GF-3 03, that were launched on August 9, 2016, November 22, 2021, and April 7, 2022,

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105 respectively. Each of the GF-3 carries the C-band multi-polarization SAR that has the world's  
106 largest number of imaging modes with multiple spatial resolutions ranging from 1 m to 500 m and  
107 daily temporal resolution. GF-3 is similar to ESA's Sentinel-1 (Appendix Table A4).

108 GaoFen-4 (GF-4) was launched on December 29, 2015, with [an expected lifetime](#) of 8 years. GF-4  
109 is the world's highest spatial resolution geostationary satellite equipped with a 5-channel PMS  
110 camera which has a spatial resolution of 50 m (in staring mode). The spectral range of PMS is  
111 located between visible and near-infrared. In addition, GF-4 also has a one-channel mid-infrared  
112 camera with a spatial resolution of 400 m. GF-4/PMS is similar to GOES-R/ABI and Himawari-  
113 8/AHI.

114 GaoFen-5 (GF-5) [are](#) mainly used as a full-spectrum hyperspectral satellites launched on May 9,  
115 2018 ([GF-5 01](#)), and July 9, 2021 ([GF-5 02](#)), with [an expected lifetime](#) of 8 years. [Each of GF-5](#)  
116 [satellite](#) carries the Advanced Hyperspectral Imager (AHSI) that has 330 bands from 400 – 2500 nm  
117 with a spatial resolution of 30 m. GF-5/AHSI is similar to EO-1/Hyperion and DLR/DESI-  
118 (Appendix Table A5).

119 GaoFen-7 (GF-7), launched on November 3, 2019, is mainly used as a high spatial resolution stereo  
120 mapping satellite. GF-7 breakthrough the sub-meter stereo mapping technology, and can acquire  
121 satellite stereo maps with a scale of 1:10,000.

122 **Table 1** Specifications of the sensors onboard the GF satellites

Satellite	Payload
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		Band No.	Spectral Range ( $\mu m$ )	Spatial Resolution (m)	Swath Width (km)	Revisit Cycle (days)	Similar Sensors	
GF-1	Panchromatic & Multispectral Camera (PMS)	pan	0.45~0.90	2	60 (2 Cameras)	4	SPOT-6(7)/ NAOMI	
		1	0.45~0.52	8				
		2	0.52~0.59					
		3	0.63~0.69					
	Wide-Field View Multispectral Camera (WV)	4	0.77~0.89	16	800 (4 Cameras)	2	Sentinel-2/ MSI	
		5	0.45~0.52					
		6	0.52~0.59					
		7	0.63~0.69					
GF-2	PMS	8	0.77~0.89	4	45 (2 Cameras)	5	WorldView-3/WV110	
		pan	0.45~0.90					1
		1	0.45~0.52					
		2	0.52~0.59					
		3	0.63~0.69					
GF-3	Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR)	-	C-band: 4-8 GHz	1-500	5-650	Single Vision: <3d Double Vision: <1.5d	Sentinel-1	
		GF-4	PMS	pan	0.45~0.90	50	500	20 Seconds
1	0.45~0.52							
2	0.52~0.60							
3	0.63~0.69							
4	0.76~0.90							
GF-5	Infrared Multispectral Camera (IRS)	5	3.50~4.10	400	400			
		Advanced Hyperspectral Imager (AHSI)	1-300	0.40~2.50	-	60	5	DLR & PRISMA
	Visible and Infrared Multispectral	1	0.45~0.52	20				
		2	0.52~0.60					
		3	0.62~0.68					
		4	0.76~0.86					

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	Imager_ (VIMI)	5	1.55~1.75				
		6	2.08~2.35				
		7	3.50~3.90				
		8	4.85~5.05				
		9	8.01~8.39	40			
		10	8.42~8.83				
		11	10.3~11.3				
		12	11.4~12.5				
GF-6	PMS		Same as GF-1/PMS		90 (2 Cameras)	4	
	WFV	1	0.45~0.52				
		2	0.52~0.59				
		3	0.63~0.69				Same as GF-1
		4	0.77~0.89		800 (4 Cameras)	2	
		5	0.69~0.73	16			
		6	0.73~0.77				
		7	0.40~0.45				
		8	0.59~0.63				
GF-7	Bi-linear	pan	0.45~0.90	0.8			
	Array	1	0.45~0.52				
	Stereo	2	0.52~0.59		20	5	SPOT-6(7)/NAOMI
	Mapping	3	0.63~0.69	3.2			
	Camera	4	0.77~0.89				
	Laser Altimeter				-		

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131 2.2 ZiYuan satellites

132 ZiYuan (ZY in acronym, or “Resources”) represents a series of Chinese Earth resource satellites

133 that so far has ZY-1, ZY-2 and ZY-3 in orbits. There are two types of ZY-1 satellites. The first one,

134 ZY-1 01, 02, 02B and 04 satellites, which were made jointly by China and Brazil, is also called

135 China-Brazil Earth Resource Satellite (CBERS). At present, there is only ZY-04 (CBERS-04)

operating which was launched on December 7, 2014, with an expected lifetime of 3 years. The other type of ZY-1 includes ZY-1 02C and 02D and 02E satellites were made in China, and were launched on December 22, 2011, September 12, 2019, and December 26, 2021, respectively, all in orbits now. Detail parameters of ZY-1 satellites can be seen in Table 2.

ZiYuan-3 (ZY-3) is the first civilian high-resolution optical stereo mapping satellite of China (Li 2012; Tang and Hu 2018; Wang et al. 2014a). ZY-3 01 and 02 satellites were launched on January 9, 2012, and May 30, 2016, respectively, forming a constellation with an expected lifetime of 5 years. Each of the ZY-3 satellite carries a nadir-viewing panchromatic TDI (Time Delayed and Integration) CCD camera with a resolution of 2.1 m, two forward-looking and backward-looking panchromatic TDI CCD cameras with a resolution of 3.5 m (ZY-3 01) or 2.5 m (ZY-3 02), and a nadir-viewing multispectral camera with a resolution of 5.8 m. ZY-3 can capture images with seamless coverage between 84°N and 84°S by side-swinging and can obtain images with global coverage every 59 days, forming global long-term 2.1 m resolution stereo images and 6 m multispectral images. ZY-3 also carries a multispectral camera (MUX) which is similar to GF-1/PMS.

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Table 2 Specifications of the sensors onboard ZY satellites

Satellite	Payload	Band No.	Spectral Range ( $\mu m$ )	Spatial Resolution (m)	Swath Width (km)	Revisit Cycle (days)	Similar Sensors
CBERS-04	Panchromatic & Multispectral Camera (PMS)	pan	0.51~0.85	5	60	3	-
		1	0.52~0.59	10			
		2	0.63~0.69				

ZY-1 02C	Multispectral Camera (MUX)	3	0.77~0.89					
		1	0.45~0.52					
		2	0.52~0.59	20	120	26		
		3	0.63~0.69					
	4	0.77~0.89						
	Infrared Scanner (IRS)	1	0.50~0.90					
		2	1.55~1.75	40	120	26		
		3	2.08~2.35					
	4	10.4~12.5	80					
	Wide-Field Imager (WFI)	1	0.45~0.52					
		2	0.52~0.59	73	866	3		
		3	0.63~0.69					
		4	0.77~0.89					
	Panchromatic & Multispectral Camera (PMS)	pan	0.51~0.85	5				
		1	0.52~0.59		60			
		2	0.63~0.69	10				
3		0.77~0.89				3	-	
High Resolution Camera (HR)	pan	0.50~0.80	2.36	54				
ZY-1 02 D/E	Visible and Near- Infrared Camera (VNIC)	pan	0.452~0.902	2.5				
		1	0.452~0.521					
		2	0.522~0.607					
		3	0.635~0.694					
		4	0.776~0.895	10	115			
		5	0.416~0.452					
		6	0.591~0.633				3	-
		7	0.708~0.752					
		8	0.871~1.047					
	Advanced Hyperspectral Imager (AHSI)	1- 166	0.40~2.50	30	60			
	ZY-3	CCD	Forward		3.5	52	5	SPOT-6(7)/ NAOMI
Backward			1	0.50~0.80				
Nadir				2.1	51			
		1	0.45~0.52	6	51	3-5		

ZY-3 02	Multispectral Camera (MUX)		2	0.52~0.59			
			3	0.63~0.69			
			4	0.77~0.89			
	Forward-looking Camera						
			2.5				
	CCD	Backward-looking Camera	1	0.50~0.80	51	3~5	
	Nadir Camera		2.1				
			1	0.45~0.52			
	Multispectral Camera (MUX)		2	0.52~0.59	5.8	51	3
		3	0.63~0.69				
		4	0.77~0.89				

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2.3 HuanJing/ShiJian satellites

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HuanJing/ShiJian satellites include HuanJing-1 satellites (HJ-1 in acronym, or “Environment”) and

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ShiJian-9 (SJ-9 in acronym, or “Experiment”), are the Earth observation constellations for

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environment and nature disasters.

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HJ-1 satellites, including two optical satellites HJ-1A and HJ-1B, and one radar satellite, HJ-1C, are

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operated by the Chinese Centre for Resources Satellite Data and Application (CRESDA). HJ-1A

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and 1B were launched on September 6, 2008, simultaneously. HJ-1A carries a 30 m resolution CCD

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camera and a 100 m resolution hyperspectral Imager (HSI), while the HJ-1B satellite carries a 30 m

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resolution CCD camera and a 150 m resolution Infrared Scanner (IRS). All of the three HJ-1

satellites have [an expected lifetime](#) of 3 years, and are still functioning in orbits. HJ-1/HSI and IRS are similar to EO-1/Hyperion and Landsat-8/TIRS, respectively.

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SJ-9A/B satellites were launched on December 14, 2012, with [an expected lifetime](#) of 3 years. Equipped with PMS and IRS cameras, SJ-9 can acquire VNIR multispectral images and infrared images with 2.5 m and 10 m spatial resolution, respectively.

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**Table 3** Specifications of the sensors onboard HJ and SJ satellites

Satellite	Payload	Band No.	Spectral Range ( $\mu\text{m}$ )	Spatial Resolution (m)	Swath Width (km)	Revisit Cycle (days)	Similar Sensors			
HJ-1A	CCD Scanner	1	0.43~0.52	30	360(Single)700(Parallel)	4	Landsat Series			
		2	0.52~0.60							
		3	0.63~0.69							
		4	0.76~0.9							
	Hyperspectral Imager (HSI)	-	0.45~0.95(110-128 bands)	100	50	4				
HJ-1B	CCD Scanner	1	0.43~0.52	30	360 (Single) 700 (Parallel)	4				
		2	0.52~0.60							
		3	0.63~0.69							
		4	0.76~0.90							
	Infrared Scanner (IRS)	5	0.75~1.10	150	720	4				
		6	1.55~1.75							
		7	3.50~3.90							
		8	10.5~12.5	300						
SJ-9A	Panchromatic & Multispectral Camera (PMS)	pan	0.45~0.89	2.5	30	4	-			
		1	0.45~0.52	10						
		2	0.52~0.59							
		3	0.63~0.69							
		4	0.77~0.89							

Satellite	Payload	Number of Channels	Spectral Range (μm)	Spatial Resolution (km)	Temporal Resolution (days)	Polarization
SJ-9B	Infrared Scanner (IRS)	1	0.80~1.20	73	18	8

175    **2.4 FengYun Satellites**

176    The FengYun (FY in acronym, or “Wind and Cloud”) satellites are operated by the Chinese  
177    National Satellite Meteorological Center (NSMC). The naming convention for FY satellites is that  
178    the odd number represents the polar-orbiting while the even number represents the geostationary.  
179    FY-3 is the second generation of the Chinese polar-orbiting meteorological satellites. FY-3A and  
180    FY-3B, launched on May 27, 2008 and November 5, 2011, respectively, are the first two that carry  
181    a Visible and Infra-Red Radiometer (VIRR) and a Medium Resolution Spectral Imager (MERSI),  
182    among other sensors for atmospheric remote sensing (Dong et al. 2009; Zhang et al. 2015). FY-3C<sub>1</sub>  
183    [launched on September 23, 2013, is the first operational satellite of FY-3 constellation and carries a](#)  
184    [MERSI same as FY-3A/FY-3B. FY-3D<sub>1</sub> was launched on November 15, 2017, with an upgraded](#)  
185    second generation MERSI instrument (MERSI-II) [onboard](#) (Wang et al. 2019). The MERSI-II has a  
186    better infrared sensing ability than the MERSI by dividing the original wide infrared spectral  
187    channel into six narrow mid- and thermal infrared channels. In addition, MERSI-II also adds the  
188    shortwave infrared channel (1.38 μm) and the onboard calibration instrument for the cirrus  
189    detection and calibration. FY-3/VIRR is similar to NOAA/AVHRR while MERSI is similar to  
190    EOS/MODIS and NPP/VIIRS.

191    **Table 4** Specifications of the sensors onboard FY-3 satellites

Satellite	Payload	Similar Sensors
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		Band No.	Spectral Range ( $\mu m$ )	Spatial Resolution (m)	Swath Width (km)	Revisit Cycle (days)	
	Visible and Infra-Red Radiometer (VIRR)	1	0.58-0.68				
		2	0.84-0.89				
		3	3.55-3.93				
		4	10.3-11.3				
		5	11.5-12.5	1000	2800	5.5	NOAA/AVHRR
		6	1.55-1.64				
		7	0.43-0.48				
		8	0.48-0.53				
		9	0.53-0.58				
		10	1.325-1.395				
FY-3C	Medium Resolution Spectral Imager (MERSI)	1	0.42~0.52				
		2	0.5~0.6				
		3	0.6~0.7	250			
		4	0.815~0.915				
		5	8.75~13.75				
		6	0.392~0.432				
		7	0.423~0.463				
		8	0.47~0.51				
		9	0.5~0.54				
		10	0.545~0.585		2800	5.5	MODIS &
		11	0.63~0.67				VIIRS
		12	0.665~0.705				
		13	0.745~0.785	1000			
		14	0.845~0.885				
		15	0.885~0.925				
		16	0.92~0.96				
		17	0.96~1				
		18	1.01~1.05				
		19	1.59~1.69				
		20	2.08~2.18				
FY-3D	Medium Resolution Spectral Imager- II (MERSI- II )	1	0.402~0.422	1000			
		2	0.433~0.453				
		3	0.445~0.495	250	2800	5.5	MODIS &
		4	0.48~0.5	1000			VIIRS
		5	0.525~0.575	250			

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	6	0.545~0.565	1000
	7	0.625~0.675	250
	8	0.66~0.68	
	9	0.699~0.719	1000
	10	0.736~0.756	
	11	0.855~0.875	
	12	0.84~0.89	250
	13	0.895~0.915	
	14	0.926~0.946	
	15	0.915~0.965	
	16	1.23~1.31	
	17	1.365~1.395	
	18	1.615~1.665	1000
	19	2.105~2.155	
	20	2.99~3.17	
	21	3.9725~4.1275	
	22	6.95~7.45	
	23	8.4~8.7	
	24	10.3~11.3	250
	25	11.5~12.5	

197    **2.5 TanSat**

198    The Chinese Carbon Dioxide Observation Satellite named as TanSat (or “Carbon Satellite”),  
199    launched on December 22, 2016, is the third satellite for global CO<sub>2</sub> monitoring with an expected  
200    lifetime of 3 years. TanSat operates in the Sun-synchronous orbit with an orbit period of 98.89  
201    minutes. Equipped with the Atmospheric Carbon-dioxide Grating Spectroradiometer (ACGS),  
202    TanSat can capture weak filling effect of the dark Fraunhofer line at Fe (758 nm) and KI (771 nm)  
203    from solar-induced chlorophyll fluorescence (SIF) emitted by photosynthetically active land  
204    vegetation. Hence, TanSat can not only dynamically monitor the global CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere, but  
205    also retrieve SIF precisely. SIF, combined with simultaneous atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentration data,

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can accurately estimate global vegetation photosynthetic productivity, which contributes greatly to the global carbon cycle monitoring. Apart from ACGS, TanSat also carries the Cloud Aerosol Polarization Imager (CAPI), which can measure information such as clouds and atmospheric particulate, leading to more accurate CO<sub>2</sub> concentration retrieval (Liu et al. 2018; Zhang et al. 2018; Ran et al. 2019; Ji et al. 2019). TanSat is similar to GOSAT/TANSO-FTS, OCO-2, Sentinel-5P/TROPOMI and FLEX/FLORIS that will be launched in 2025 (Appendix Table A6). Data derived from GF, ZY, HJ satellites are available at China Centre For Resources Satellite Data and Application (<http://www.cresda.com/EN/>), and FY and TanSat data are available at National Satellite Meteorological Center (NSMC) (<http://www.nsmc.org.cn/nsmc/en/home/index.html>). All data accessing platforms are featured with English language support.

### 3 Retrieval of vegetation parameters using CEOS sensors

#### 3.1 Vegetation Index

Vegetation indices (VIs) such as normalized difference vegetation index (NDVI) are simple and effective parameters used to characterize vegetation cover and growth using remote sensing technique (Bannari et al. 1995; Kalaitzidis et al. 2010; Pettorelli 2013). With a spatial resolution as high as 16 m, VIs derived from GF-1/WFV provided enough spatial details for mapping vegetation in heterogeneous landscapes such as mountain areas (Zhao et al. 2019, 2020). Zhao et al. (Zhao et al. 2013) and Yuan et al. (Yuan et al. 2015) analyzed the relationships of several commonly used vegetation indices (i.e. NDVI, SAVI, and EVI) derived from HJ-1/CCD and Landsat-5/TM or

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231 Landsat-7/ETM+, and found that there was a significant positive correlation for all indices among  
232 different sensors ( $R^2 > 0.90$ ). Specifically, HJ-1/CCD NDVI is higher than Landsat NDVI in areas  
233 with sparse vegetation cover, while the opposite is true in areas with high vegetation cover. This can  
234 be attributed to the fact that the upper limit of the spectral range in the red band and the lower limit  
235 of the spectral range in the NIR band of HJ-1/CCD are in the range of 0.70~0.75  $\mu m$ , which  
236 generally has smaller reflectance than the Spectral Response Function (SRF) of red and NIR band  
237 not cross the range used by, leading to smaller HJ-1/CCD NDVI for densely vegetated areas. Due to  
238 the spectral similarity of the bands, Chen et al. (2015) established conversion equations between  
239 HJ-1/CCD and EOS/MODIS NDVI, offering the potential for multi-sensor data fusion.

240 Wu et al. (2011) analyzed the relationship between FY-3A/MERSI and Terra/MODIS VIs and  
241 further verified them using ground VI measurements. The results showed that Terra/MODIS VIs  
242 had a higher correlation with field data than FY-3A/MERSI VIs, which was attributed to the  
243 broader FY-3A/MERSI bandwidth that was more sensitive to atmospheric influences. Ge et al.  
244 (2007) found a strong correlation between FY-3A/MERSI and Terra/MODIS VIs ( $R = 0.99$ ), and  
245 further confirmed the sensitivity of MERSI reflectance to atmospheric water vapor content based on  
246 the MODTRAN atmospheric radiative transfer model simulation, especially when water vapor  
247 content was greater than  $5g/cm^2$ .

248 There are also several studies that utilized time series VIs derived from CEOS sensors to study  
249 vegetation phenology (Li et al. 2017; Yang et al. 2017; Wang et al. 2014). For instance, Song et al.  
250 (2018) extracted phenological information from double-cropping rice using 30 m HJ-1/CCD data

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and well revealed the growth of sub-field rice. Li et al. (2019) used HJ-1/CCD data to study forest phenology, and analyzed the response of tree phenology to meteorological forcing.

### 3.2 Fractional Vegetation Cover

Fractional Vegetation Cover (FVC) is expressed as a percentage of the vertical projected area of vegetation (including stems, leaves, and branches) to the ground area (Gitelson et al. 2002), which is widely used in land degradation research and also an input to surface energy balance and hydrological models (Pettorelli et al. 2005b; Wang et al. 2020; Younes et al. 2019). Liu et al. (2019) performed FVC retrieval using GF-1/WFV and PMS based on the dimidiate pixel model, and found that the uncertainty of PMS was lower than WFV due to higher spatial resolution. It demonstrates that more details about spatial soil/vegetation heterogeneity are beneficial for land degradation assessment. Sun et al. (2015) found that GF-1/WFV provided FVC with better accuracy than Landsat-8/OLI in sparse grassland ecosystems, and further reported that the correction of view angle effect resulting from large swath of GF-1/WFV could reduce uncertainty in the retrieval of the FVC by 7.5% - 7.8% with combination of HJ-1/CCD NDVI (Sun et al. 2020).

Zhang et al. (Zhang et al. 2013) retrieved FVC using VIs calculated from HJ-1/HSI data through an optimal band combination approach with good accuracy ( $R^2 = 0.86$ ,  $RMSE = 0.11$ ). Taking advantage of the high spatial and spectral resolutions of HJ-1/HSI, Liao & Zhang (2020) optimized the selection of endmember spectrum for theoretically pure vegetation, shaded, and soil based on Pixel Purity Index (PPI) and Endmember Average Root mean square error (EAR), and retrieved

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279 FVC using the MESMA (Multiple Endmember Spectral Mixture Analysis) method. The results  
280 showed that, with the high spatial and spectral resolution data, the accuracy of the retrieved FVC  
281 was improved (RMSE = 0.19). Bian et al. (2017) proposed an adaptive Endmember Selection  
282 Linear Spectral Mixture Model (ASLSMM) based on HJ-1/CCD data to enhance the accuracy of  
283 FVC estimation. Compared with the traditional Linear Spectral Mixture Model (LSMM) and  
284 ~~Multiple Endmember Spectral Mixture Analysis (MESMA)~~ methods, the ASLSMM method is  
285 more consistent with the ground ~~measurements~~. Liu et al. (2021) applied FY-3B/MERSI data to  
286 estimate FVC using PROSAIL ~~vegetation radiative transfer~~ model and random forest method, and  
287 the results showed good agreement with the EOLAB (Earth Observation Laboratory) reference  
288 FVC data (RMSE = 0.13).

289 **3.3 Leaf Area Index**

290 Leaf Area Index (LAI) refers to the total area of plant leaves per unit of land area (Chen and Black  
291 1992), and is a key determinant of net primary productivity of ecosystems and energy exchange  
292 between the atmosphere and land surface (Wang et al. 2019a; Yan et al. 2019). Li et al. (2016) used  
293 a statistical regression approach to estimate LAI of winter wheat from HJ-1/CCD images with good  
294 accuracy (~~relative RSME, or r~~ RMSE = 29.15%). Wei et al. (2017c) and Lei et al. (2018) applied the  
295 physical PROSAIL model to retrieve LAIs of maize crop and *Acacia Ricchii* plantation respectively  
296 using GF-1/WFV data, and reported similar accuracies (RMSE = 0.5 ~~m<sup>2</sup> m<sup>-2</sup>~~ for maize crop, and  
297 RMSE = 0.13 ~~m<sup>2</sup> m<sup>-2</sup>~~ for *Acacia Ricchii* plantation).

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301 In addition to empirical and physical model-based approaches, machine learning (ML) has also  
302 been used to retrieve LAI from CEOS data. Lei et al. (2018) found ML-based approach offered  
303 higher accuracy (RMSE = 0.50  $\text{m}^2 \cdot \text{m}^{-2}$ ) in estimating LAI than the empirical VI-based regression  
304 approach (RMSE = 0.67  $\text{m}^2 \cdot \text{m}^{-2}$ ). Wei et al. (2017a) estimated LAIs of cropland from GF-5/AHSI  
305 hyperspectral data using the RF-KNN model with an RMSE of 0.70  $\text{m}^2 \cdot \text{m}^{-2}$ .

306 **3.4 Aboveground Biomass**

307 Aboveground Biomass (AGB) refers to the total amount of plant-derived living and dead organic  
308 matter per unit of surface area, which is an important component of terrestrial carbon cycle.  
309 Obtaining the spatial and temporal variations of AGB with high accuracy is critical to many  
310 applications such as the estimation of crop yields, pasture forage and forest timber production  
311 (Brown et al. 1996; Lu 2006). Wang et al. (2014b) estimated the AGB of the Yellow River Estuary  
312 wetlands from GF-1/WFV data using statistical regression approach against ground samplint data  
313 with an MRE (Mean Relative Error) of 23.9%. Gou et al. (2019) combined VIs and texture  
314 information extracted from GF-2/PMS images to estimate the AGB of *Pinus tabuliformis*  
315 plantations with an RMSE of 0.43 t/hm<sup>2</sup>. Gao et al. (2019) retrieved AGB using high-resolution  
316 unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) measurement, then scaled up to regional scale by establishing a  
317 regression model using GF-1/WFV NDVI. It reported that the uncertainty was reduced (RMSE =  
318 68.04 g/m<sup>2</sup>) in comparison to only using GF-1/WFV (RMSE = 128.75 g/m<sup>2</sup>),  
319 ZY-3/MUX data were also used for estimating AGB, such as in Gao et al. (2014), in which the

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326 regression model between VIs acquired from ZY-3/MUX and ground measured shrub AGB in  
327 mountainous areas was established. Due to the capability of acquiring multi-angle observations with  
328 the three TDI cameras, the stereo image can be obtained, from which detailed topographic  
329 information can be used to perform accurate topographic correction to the original data, leading to a  
330 21% reduction in the uncertainty in the estimated AGB. Taking the advantage of the multitemporal,  
331 high-resolution multispectral, and stereo images provided by ZY-3/TDI, Li et al. (2019a) proposed  
332 an improved workflow for estimating forest AGB based on the retrieval of relative canopy height,  
333 which produced AGB retrieval with higher accuracy (RMSE = 24.49 Mg/ha, rRMSE =21.37%)  
334 compared to the derived AGB using spectral data only (RMSE = 33.89 Mg/ha, rRMSE = 29.57%).

335 **3.5 Sun-induced chlorophyll fluorescence (SIF)**

336 Under the illumination of natural light, green plants can release the light at the wavelength of 650 -  
337 800 nm during photosynthetic activity, which is named as Solar-Induced chlorophyll Fluorescence  
338 (SIF) (Joiner et al. 2013). SIF is the by-products of photosynthesis, which originated from Absorbed  
339 Photosynthetically Active Productivity (APAR) and has a common origin with plants' carbon  
340 sequestration and heat dissipation. Hence, SIF is highly related to vegetation stress conditions  
341 (Porcar-Castell et al. 2014), and has the potential to be a good remote sensing proxy for Gross Primary  
342 Productivity (GPP) (Guanter et al. 2014, Mohammed et al. 2019).  
343 Previously, data sources used for retrieving SIF mainly include GOSAT, OCO-2, GOME-2,  
344 SCIAMACHY, and Sentinel-5P/TROPOMI (Joiner et al. 2011; Frankenberg et al. 2014; Köhler et

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al. 2015, 2018; Sun et al. 2018). Recently, the potential of estimating SIF and related GPP products (Du et al. 2021) from Chinese TanSat has also been explored. Du et al. (2018) used the TanSat data for retrieving global SIF, and the result agreed well with the pattern obtained from the OCO-2 SIF product ( $R^2=0.86$ ), providing a new opportunity for global sampling of SIF at fine spatial resolution ( $2\text{ km} \times 2\text{ km}$ ). Li et al. (2021) developed an approach for retrieving SIF from ultra-high spectral satellite data and tested using both TanSat and OCO-2 data. Ma et al. (2020) generated a Global Spatially Continuous TanSat SIF Product using the machine-learning method with a spatial resolution of  $0.05^\circ$ , showing a good consistency with the TROPOMI SIF data ( $R^2 = 0.73$ ). Yao et al. (2021) used TanSat data to produce a new global SIF product for 757 nm spanning the period of March, 2017 to February, 2018 based on the Institute of Atmospheric Physics Carbon Dioxide Retrieval Algorithm for Satellite Remote Sensing (IAPCAS)-DOAS method. In general, TanSat IAPCAS-DOAS/SIF product showed the seasonal variation of derived SIF being consistent with the vegetation growing state throughout the year, which has also been observed by the GOSAT and OCO-2 SIF products. Based on the above research, several global SIF products from TanSat have been developed and released for public access (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Global SIF products from TanSat

Author	Time Spanning	Temporal Resolution	Spatial Resolution	Links	Note
Liu et al.	2017.3-2019.8	1 day	2km	<a href="http://data.casearth.cn/sdo/detail/5d905086088716491c0cc1f4">http://data.casearth.cn/sdo/detail/5d905086088716491c0cc1f4</a>	Available
Du et al.	2017.7	1 day	2km	<a href="https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.14775.98726">https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.14775.98726</a>	Available
Ma et al.	2017.1-2019.12	4 days	0.05°	<a href="https://zenodo.org/record/3884309">https://zenodo.org/record/3884309</a>	Available

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Yao et al.	2017.3-2018.2	unknown	2°	<a href="https://www.chinageoss.org/tansat">https://www.chinageoss.org/tansat</a>	To be published
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378 **4 Research opportunities offered by the addition of CEOS sensors**

379 **4.1 Multi-sensor data fusion**

380 Observations from a single satellite sensor often trade off spatial resolution against temporal

381 resolution, or vice versa, resulting in sub-optimal ~~resolving capability for monitoring~~ vegetation

382 dynamics. It is an effective way for achieving both high spatial and temporal resolutions by fusing

383 data from different sensors. Pi et al. (2021) reconstructed an NDVI dataset with 16 m spatial

384 resolution and 16-day temporal resolution by fusing GF-1/WFV with MOD13Q1 NDVI based on

385 the STARFM (Spatial and Temporal Adaptive Reflectance Fusion Model) algorithm. Yin et al.

386 (2016) found that by fusing EOS/MODIS and FY-3/MERSI observations, which share high

387 similarity in terms of spectral band configuration, the spatio-temporal gaps of LAI retrievals were

388 significantly reduced, leading to more ~~complete~~ data over the cloud-prone sub-tropical and tropical

389 forests. Wu et al. (2015) applied the Spatial and Temporal Data Fusion Approach (STDFA) to

390 create a time series daily NDVI for crop phenology monitoring through the fusion of HJ-1/CCD or

391 GF-1/WFV with MODIS data, and the output revealed detailed sub-field crop growth at daily time-

392 step. Refined spatio-temporal resolutions by multi-sensor fusion would offer many advantages to

393 ~~applications~~ such as habitat quality assessment, crop yield prediction, as well as urban phenology

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398 research.

399 **4.2 Data continuity & data recovery**

400 For global change studies, it is critical to ensure long-term data continuity and consistency. China  
401 has launched and is planning to launch many spaceborne sensors covering a wide range of sensor  
402 types and spatial-temporal resolutions, offering great potential to achieve sustainable monitoring of  
403 global change, or be used as a backup for other commonly used sensors. For instance, the  
404 hyperspectral instrument AHSI onboard the CEOS GF-5 with 30 m spatial resolution and 330  
405 narrow spectral bands, together with ASI/PRISMA and DLR/DESI, can be good successors for the  
406 EO-1/Hyperion which has ceased operation since 2014.

407 On other occasions, orbiting sensor is possible to encounter instrument failure. If similar  
408 instruments are available from other satellites, a virtual constellation can be formed to mimic the  
409 functioning (He et al. 2018; Yueh et al. 2016). One example is the recovery of the SMAP mission  
410 after the radar failure by ingesting data from ESA's Sentinel-1 C-band SAR (Meyer et al. 2021).  
411 and in this case, GF-3 C-band SAR can be an alternative. Another example is filling the data gaps  
412 caused by the Scan-Line-Corrector off (SLC-off) failure of Landsat-7/ETM+ using Sentinel-2/MSI  
413 (Wang et al. 2021). HJ-1/CCD has the same spatial resolution and almost identical band  
414 configuration with Landsat-7/ETM, and hence its potential for resolving the SLC-off issue can also  
415 be explored in the future (Figure 3). These are all beneficial to the end-users in global vegetation  
416 and ecological remote sensing community.

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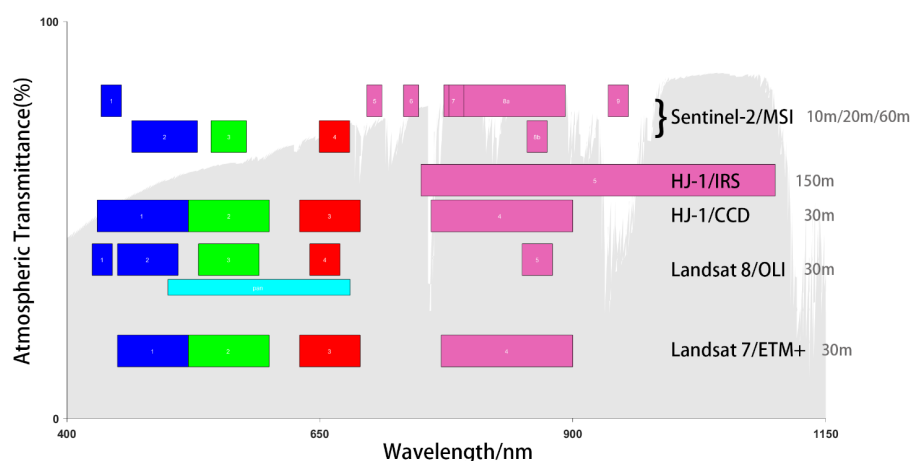


Figure 3 Spectral band comparisons among Landsat-7/ETM+, Landsat-8/OLI, HJ-1/CCD, HJ-1/IRS, and Sentinel-2/MSI.

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### 4.3 Multi-angle remote sensing

Multi-angle remote sensing is an effective way to infer surface BRDF (Bidirectional Reflectance Distribution Function) that can be further used to retrieve albedo, [normalize surface reflectance](#), [anisotropy](#) and estimate vegetation structure (Yan et al. 2021). BRDF retrieval using single-sensor data often suffers from limited angular sampling due to cloud or aerosols, e.g., MODIS has only a 75.8% probability that having more than 7 cloud-free observations within a 16 d window (Wen 2015). Multi-sensor data can be combined to accumulate a sufficient number of multi-angle observations in a short time for improving BRDF retrievals. In addition, multi-angle data can also be used to improve the retrievals of vegetation parameters. Bicheron et al. (1999) reported that forest classification uncertainty can be reduced if multi-spectral data is used in conjunction with multi-angle data which can provide additional information about forest canopy structure (Hyman

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448 and Barnsley 1997). Wen et al. (2016) developed a multi-sensor combined BRDF inversion (MCBI)  
449 by combining data from MODIS, AVHRR, VIIRS and FY-3/MERSI, and shortened the retrieval  
450 window up to 4 days in comparison to the standard 16-day product by only using MODIS data.

451 Sensors onboard the CEOSs, in together with other spaceborne sensors, can offer great potential for  
452 obtaining multi-angle data via rigorous cross-sensor calibration.

453 **5 Concluding remarks**

454 China has invested immensely in EO missions over the past decade, creating now a spaceship fleet  
455 resembling those from NASA or ESA. It has been demonstrated by the recent studies that the  
456 sensors onboard the CEOSs performed generally well in remote sensing of vegetation applications.  
457 These sensors can be used either solely for retrieving vegetation parameters or in together with  
458 other international satellites for multi-sensor applications. Although most applications we reviewed  
459 here were mainly performed by the Chinese research community, the international users are  
460 certainly encouraged to access the data as most of the data we reviewed above are publicly available  
461 and have English language support for the data access portal. The experiences and critics gain from  
462 both the domestic and international end-users would be extremely valuable to the CEOS programs  
463 to further improve sensors quality and reliability, eventually leading to a better understanding of  
464 pressing scientific issues such as global environmental change, sustainability development, food  
465 security and biodiversity conservation. While this article is being read, CEOS sensors are  
466 continuously measuring reflectance and echo over the entire planet. It is now the time to capitalize

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494 them for the benefit of global vegetation and Earth monitoring.

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495 **Acknowledgement**

496 This study is supported by National Natural Science Foundation of China (No. 42171305, Principal  
497 Investigator: X. Ma); Natural Science Foundation of Gansu Province, China (No. 21JR7RA499, PI:  
498 X. Ma); Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities (No. lzujbky-2021-ct11, PI: X.  
499 Ma). The authors thank Yifei Gao for preparing reference list.

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500 **Appendix**

501 **Table A1** Comparison between GF-1(6)/WFV and Sentinel-2/MSI

Satellite	<a href="#">Payload</a>	Band No.	Spectral Range ( $\mu m$ )	Spatial Resolution at nadir (m)	Swath Width (km)	Revisit Cycle (days)
GF-1		1	0.45~0.52	16		
		2	0.52~0.59			
		3	0.63~0.69			
		4	0.77~0.89			
GF-6	Wide-Field View Multispectral Camera (WFV)	1	0.45~0.52	16	800 (4 Cameras)	2
		2	0.52~0.59			
		3	0.63~0.69			
		4	0.77~0.89			
		5	0.69~0.73			
		6	0.73~0.77			
		7	0.40~0.45			
		8	0.59~0.63			
Sentinel-2	Multi-Spectral Instrument (MSI)	2	0.458~0.523	10	290	5
		3	0.543~0.578			
		4	0.65~0.68			
		8	0.785~0.90			
		5	0.698~0.713	20		

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507 **Table A2** Comparison between GF-1(6)/PMS, ZY-3/MUX and SPOT-6(7)/NAOMI

Satellite	<a href="#">Payload</a>	Band No.	Spectral Range ( $\mu m$ )	Spatial Resolution at nadir (m)	Swath Width (km)	Revisit Cycle (days)	Deleted: Sensor			
GF-1/6	Panchromatic	pan	0.45~0.90	2	60 (2 Cameras)	4	Deleted: with			
	&	1	0.45~0.52	8						
	Multispectral	2	0.52~0.59							
	Camera	3	0.63~0.69							
	(PMS)	4	0.77~0.89							
ZY-3	Multispectral Camera (MUX)	1	0.45~0.52	6	51	5				
		2	0.52~0.59							
		3	0.63~0.69							
		4	0.77~0.89							
SPOT-6/7	New Astrosat	pan	0.45~0.75	1.5	60	1 (2 Cameras)	Deleted: with			
	Optical	1	0.45~0.52	6						
	Modular	2	0.53~0.6							
	Instrument	3	0.62~0.69							
	(NAOMI)	4	0.76~0.89							

508

509 **Table A3** Comparison between GF-2/PMS, QuickBird and WorldView-3/WV110

Satellite	<a href="#">Payload</a>	Band No.	Deleted: Sensor
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515 **Table A4** Comparison of SAR satellites between GF-3 and Sentinel-1

Satellite	<a href="#">Payload</a>	Operational Mode	Spatial Resolution at nadir (m)	Swath Width (km)	Polarization Mode (Selectable)
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518 **Table A5** Comparison of Hyperspectral satellites between GF-5/AHSI, HJ-1A/[HSI](#), DLR/DESI and PRISM

Satellite	<a href="#">Payload</a>	Number of Bands	Spectral Range ( $\mu\text{m}$ )	Spectral Resolution(nm)	Spatial Resolution at nadir (m)	Swath Width (km)	Revisit Cycle (days)
HJ-1A	Hyperspectral Imager (HSI)	110- 128	0.45~0.95	3.9~4.5	100	50	4
GF-5	Advanced Hyperspectral Imager (AHSI)	300	0.40~2.50	5(VNIR) 10(SWIR)	30	60	5
DLR	DLR Earth Sensing	235	0.40~1.00	2.55	30	30	3-5

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Imaging Spectrometer (DESI)							
PRISMA	-	240	0.40~2.50	< 12	30	30	7

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522 **Table A6** Comparison of TanSat/ACGS, OCO-2 and Sentinel-5P/TROPOMI

Satellite	Payload	Band No.	Spectral Range (nm)	Spectral Resolution (nm)	Spatial Resolution (km)	Swath Width (km)	Revisit Cycle (days)
TanSat	Atmospheric Carbon-dioxide Grating Spectroradiometer (ACGS)	$O_2 - A$	758~778	0.033-0.047	2	20	16
OCO-2	Spectrometers	$O_2 - A$	758~772	0.04	1.29×2.25	10.6	16
Sentinel-5P	TROPOspheric Monitoring Instrument (TROPOMI)	NIR	675~775	0.5	7×7	2600	1

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