

Towards Better Images.jl Ecosystem

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Abstract

This project aims to achieve a better ecosystem for [Images.jl](#), an image-processing toolbox in [Julia](#). Main contributions consist of user-friendly documentation of Images.jl ecosystem, developer manual, and more consistent, robust, and extensible APIs. This project also serves as a subproject to Images.jl v1.0 milestone.

The author is currently a third-year graduate student and Ph.D candidate in School of Mathematical Sciences, East China Normal University, Shanghai. His current research interests are image processing and computer vision, convex optimization, and machine learning. More information about him is listed in section [3](#).

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1 Project Description

[Images.jl](#) is a Julia image-processing toolbox that provides a collection of out-of-box functions¹ to do image processing tasks just like [scikit-image](#) and [MATLAB Image Processing Toolbox](#) do.

However, despite of the not yet benchmarked performance, this toolbox at present is still not friendly to both users and developers. Unlike other mature julia packages such as [JuMP.jl](#) and [GPUArrays.jl](#), Images.jl requires potential users and developers to understand the very details of its mechanism and architecture, and this becomes even harder for them without comprehensive documentation on it. Under this circumstance, many image-processing researchers are still using Python and MATLAB for their daily work.

Some apparent causes for its poor usability are:

- there're few demos or recipes in Images.jl for new users to start with;
- the API varies greatly across Images.jl submodules, and can be unintuitive to the non-experts;
- there's no image-processing-specific style guide on naming and programming, except the [Julia style guide](#);
- there're too many temporary helper functions defined everywhere;
- Images.jl is an ecosystem but it lacks of a comprehensive illustration of its packages;
- coverage of trait functions are not fully tested.

Fundamentally this is because that it is still in the progress of finding the most suitable programming style to process images using Julia.

Fortunately the problem is well-concerned in the community. Issues such as

- [JuliaImages/ImageCore.jl#63](#) and [JuliaMath/FixedPointNumbers.jl#41](#) – how to deal with overflow behavior of default N0f8 type?
- [JuliaImages/Images.jl#766](#) – Use `channelview` as possible as we can?
- [JuliaImages/Images.jl#767](#) – Towards consistent style, part 1: a naming guide

¹An overview of currently implemented image-processing functionalities is shown at [api comparison](#).

- [JuliaImages/Images.jl#772](#) – Revisiting the Images API
- [zygmuntzpak/ImageBinarization.jl#23](#) – What’s the appropriate argument order?
- [zygmuntzpak/ImageBinarization.jl#24](#) – Export limited number of symbols?

discuss the coding styles and programming practice in the most generic way. Packages such as [HistogramThresholding.jl](#) and [ImageBinarization.jl](#) are examples that validate the effectiveness and usefulness of style consensus reached in those issues. For instance, in [ImageBinarization.jl](#), one could binarize an image using any implemented methods² with one unified API:

```
binarize(::BinarizationAlgorithm, ::AbstractArray{T,2}) where {T}
```

With these existing work, it’s in the right time to revisit the whole Images.jl ecosystem and head towards a more easy-to-use Images.jl package. This project aims to solve this problem by:

1. providing more comprehensive and integrated documentation on both style guide and ecosystem illustration, and drafting RFCs
2. pruning codebase of the ecosystem according to the drafted RFCs

Writing demos of Images.jl is not included in this project since it belongs to a totally different project. Trait functions will be examined carefully to support high-level API design.

Basically, this is a project on documentation and code refactoring, and it is also a sub-project to Images.jl v1.0 milestone. Potentially involved packages are:

- **user entrance:** [Images.jl](#)
- **core packages:** [ImageCore.jl](#), [ImageAxes.jl](#) and [ImageMetadata.jl](#)
- **application packages:** [ImageMorphology.jl](#), [ImageTransformations.jl](#), [ImageDistances.jl](#) and [ImageFiltering.jl](#)
- **new packages**³: [ImageBinarization.jl](#), [HistogramThresholding.jl](#), [ImageInpainting.jl](#)

²At the time of writing, there’re 12 methods implemented.

³These packages are not yet imported by Images.jl.

High-level packages (e.g., [ImageTracking.jl](#)) and plotting packages (e.g., [ImageView.jl](#)) are not under consideration of this project.

While doing the documentation and code refactoring work, this project will have many side effects:

- partially rewriting of [user documentation](#) in a more meaningful way;
- potential bug reports and patches to all related **Julia** repositories;
- introduction of a new image processing packages, [ImageEdge.jl](#), to place legacy methods in [Images.jl](#)
- introduction of a new image denoising package, [ImageNoise.jl](#), as a concept-validation experimental field.⁴

Note that these side effects are not included as a part of this project.

2 Delivery Schedule

As described in the end of section 1, the project will be delivered in two stages: **documenting** and **pruning**. Documenting and recording in the first stage as a preparation, and cleaning the codebase in the second stage to make real changes to [Images.jl](#) ecosystem.

With regard to GSoC timeline, **Phase 1** evaluates the documentation work, and **Phase 2** and **Final** evaluations focus on the pruning stage. Documenting stage begins from April 22⁵ to June 24 (weeks 1-10), and pruning stage start from July 1 to August 26 (weeks 11-21). Week 10 serves as a buffer week.

2.1 Documenting

Stage Expectations

The main purpose of this stage is to provide trackable records for the next stage's pruning work. There'll be three types of records: **ecosystem documentation**, **developer manual**, and **RFCs** (Request For Comments).

Ecosystem documentation illustrates the scope of image ecosystem and relationships between different relevant packages, it helps users and developers to understand what package belongs to [Images.jl](#) and what package

⁴This is the author's research field.

⁵Although the coding officially begins from May 27, the author will start this project when he's available.

doesn't. Consisting of style guide, best practice as well as other related community-operating rules, developer manual gives a documented reference to developers to solve potential conflicts. RFCs with detailed list of API changes and porting operation will be proposed as trackable records for the pruning work in next stage.

Stage Workflow

This stage will be divided into two periods: **discussion period** and **RFC drafting period**. Ideally, this stage ends after the **Phase 1 Evaluation** with regard to GSoC timeline. However, since a lot of repositories will be involved in this project, which makes the timeline hard to be stucked to, the timeline serves in a flexible way.

The discussion period begins from April 22 to June 9 (weeks 1 to 7). In this period the community will share ideas and thoughts on the future of APIs and on best practices.

In the beginning of the descussion period, an ecosystem documentation will be add to juliaimages.github.io as soon as possible to reach a consensus on the future of Images.jl, this consensus shall serve as the fundamental principle to all future discussion and development. Ideally, the current Images.jl maintainer, i.e., [Tim Holy](#), is supposed to participate in.⁶

The RFC drafting period begins from May 27 to June 23 (weeks 6 to 9), one or more RFCs will be drafted and discussed in this period. Basically, the content of RFCs come from previous discussions. The last week of this stage is used for evaluation, merge and announcement.

From weeks 1 to 7, many discussions will happen simultaneously in the following way:

1. **Code Review:** dig into source codes of repositories of images ecosystem to find anything that's likely in need of changing. Other mature Julia packages, and image-processing libraries in other languages such as [scikit-image](#) and [MATLAB Image Processing Toolbox](#) are references.
2. **Issue Open:** open an issue for anything that is worth a discussion, e.g., legacy codes, misplaced codes, codes with bad practice, and undocumented practices and decisions.
3. **Decision Make:** the purpose of discussion is to make decision on API and practice. The conventional principles are taken: a decision is made when consensus is reached, otherwise the current maintainer of

⁶In case of maintainer being busy on other work, the author will draft a document based on his understanding and post it to the maintainer to get a feedback.

Images.jl make the decision. If a decision can't be made before June 16 (Week 8), it'll be dropped as future work.

4. **Record:** all approved, rejected and future-work proposals will be documented in a temporary repository - [GSoC2019_Document](#). Developer manual will be drafted to [juliaimages.github.io](#) when there're enough decisions made.

From weeks 6 to 9, RFC drafting⁷ will happen simultaneously in the following way:

1. **Code Review:** for each approved proposal, find all involved code pieces, and give a solution to it according to developer's manual. The principle of code review is to rigorously sticking to decisions made in the discussion period – either there's one principle or no principle.
2. **RFC Post:** post the draft-version of RFC in [GSoC2019_Document](#).
3. **Discuss:** if there's any issue with any item in the proposed RFC, suspend the related items and go back to the discussion workflow until a decision is made.
4. **Merge and Announcement:** RFCs will be merged to a new folder in [juliaimages.github.io](#) and be announced to the community via slack and discourse. RFC merge and announcement will only happen in last two weeks in case there're more items to be added.

RFC details on how codebase is pruned will be in section [2.2](#).

Stage Evaluation

Four items are evaluated during this stage, i.e., Phase 1 Evaluation:

- 2/10: activity on issues and discussions
- 2/10: ecosystem documentation
- 3/10: developer manual
- 3/10: RFCs

A score of 6/10 stands for **Evaluation Pass**.

⁷A [RFC Template](#) is available in the Tensorflow community, and [20180827-api-names.md](#) is a good API-renaming RFC example.

2.2 Pruning Codebase

After the RFCs being merged and announced to the community, the pruning stage begins. Ideally, this stage begins from July 1 to August 26 (10 weeks).

Stage Expectations

The pruning stage is to clean the codebase according to the RFC operation guide. There'll be three types of pruning work:

- symbol renaming, move, and removal
- API changes
- API enhancement

For the ease of tracking the progress, a milestone will be set in [Images.jl](#) to track the progress, and each pruning PR/issue will be assigned a tag.

Challenges during this stage are: backward incompatibility, and complex package dependencies. The next section will be strategies to this challenges.

Stage Workflow

One principle of the pruning work is to start from packages with the least dependencies to that with the most dependencies. In this project, we do from core packages (e.g., [ImageCore.jl](#)), to application packages (e.g., [ImageTransformations.jl](#)), and finally to the user-entrance package, i.e., [Images.jl](#).

In this stage, the workflow of pruning work is:

1. create a separate branch **api-prune** in each involved repositories
2. port all methods and symbols in separate branches – backward incompatible
3. merge into **master**, tag a minor⁸ version
4. freeze minor version for one or two months to let downstream packages upgrade their codebase. In the meantime, do backward compatible API enhancement
5. remove deprecated symbols, methods and their tests, tag a minor version

⁸According to [Semantic Versioning](#), minor version should be backward compatible. However, in this project, it's not suitable to bump **major** version until all the pruning work is done, hence here we bump **minor** and **patch** version.

Steps 1-3 will be done as a part of GSoC project, and steps 4-5 will be future work. Porting methods from package package A to package B takes the following routine:

1. implement new methods and unit tests in package B
2. in package A, move methods to a separate `deprecated.jl` file and deprecate them

Stage Evaluation

With regard to GSoC timeline, this stage includes the **Phase 2** and **Phase final** evaluations. The milestone progress is a numeric way to evaluate this project, note that the evaluation is based on numbers of opened PRs instead of merged PRs, since there will be delays to get input from all people on pull requests. Future work will not be counted.

The **Phase 2** evaluation shall focus on checking if the pruning work begins as expected, 10% progress is enough to mark a **Evaluation Pass**. The **Phase final** evaluation shall focus on checking if the major part of pruning work is done, 70% progress is enough to mark a **Evaluation Pass**.

3 About the Author

My name is Jiuning Chen. I'm currently doing research related to image processing, computer vision, convex optimization and machine learning. 40+ hours per week can be guaranteed on this project.

Programming Background

I started to use MATLAB to do research on image processing in the end of 2016, met Julia after its v1.0 announcement, and learned Python during the Spring Festival of 2019.

Although my programming career is less than three years, however, I think I'm qualified to achieve the project expectations for the non-trivial contributions I've done to the Julia community:

- PR(merged): [JuliaImages/ImageTransformations.jl#58](#) reviewed by [Christof Stocker](#) and [Tim Holy](#);
- PR(merged): [JuliaImages/ImageTransformations.jl#59](#) reviewed by [Christof Stocker](#) and [Tim Holy](#);

- PR(merged): [JuliaImages/ImageDistances.jl#8](#) reviewed by [Júlio Hoffmann](#);
- PR(merged): [JuliaImages/TestImages.jl#35](#) reviewed by [Tim Holy](#);
- PR(merged): [JuliaLang/julia#29626](#) reviewed by [Matt Bauman](#);
- PR(merged): [FluxML/Flux.jl#372](#) reviewed by [Mike J Innes](#);
- PR(merged): [FluxML/Flux.jl#371](#) reviewed by [Mike J Innes](#);

to members in the lab of my supervisor:

- Independently set up the whole self-hosted research platform from scratch for my supervisor’s laboratory⁹;
- *De facto* maintainer of the deep learning servers of the School of Mathematical Sciences, and that of a laboratory in Computer Sciences Department;
- Proudly create and maintain the homepage of my supervisor, prof. [Fang Li](#);

and to undergraduate students in the university:

- Head teaching assistant of courses of “[Deep Learning and Action \(Fall 2018\)](#)” and “[Digital Image Processing \(Spring 2019\)](#)”.
- Unofficially mentor talented students with all the best programming practices I learned from the open-source community and from the English world¹⁰.

The following is an informal self-evaluation to let you have a more structural overview of my skill:

- **Mathematics & Image Processing (8/10)**: my current research is on image denoising based on hybrid method of variational model and deep learning;
- **Linux (7/10)**: heavy usage of docker, bash, git and vim in my daily work to maintain the servers;

⁹The platform includes but not limited to homepage, documents for users and administrators, server monitor, gitlab, jupyterhub, sharelatex, DNS servers, and VPN servers.

¹⁰Most Chinese students are afraid of reading English since it’s not their native language, however, almost all best materials are in forms of it. My role here is to learn and to preach.

- **Matlab (8/10)**: the only programming language used throughout my early-stage of research;
- **Julia (6/10)**: fully understand and stick to the philosophy of Julia, but lack of real project experience;
- **Related packages (6/10)**: familiar with other image-processing packages but haven't dig into the source code of them yet;

Education Background

2016-Present (Postgraduate) Study on image processing and computer vision in School of Mathematical Sciences, East China Normal University, and supervised by Prof. [Fang Li](#).

2013-2016 (Undergraduate) Bachelor of philosophy, Department of Philosophy, Shanghai University.

2011-2013 (Undergraduate) Study on metal material in School of Material Sciences, Shanghai University.