Geographer Li An Receives 2023 AAG Distinguished Scholarship Honor

Li An, professor of geography, and fellow of the American Association of Geographers (AAG) and the American Association for Advancement of Science was awarded a 2023 AAG Distinguished Scholarship Honor.

"I am thrilled to know this terrific news! As this is the highest scholarship honor given by AAG, I feel I am so blessed and privileged to receive it," An said.

An is an internationally recognized geographer known for his pioneering contributions to agent-based modeling and space-time analysis that strengthen the ability to understand spatiotemporal variability of complex human-environmental processes.

His work is motivated by his longing for peace and strength in human-environment interactions through improved sustainability — a motivation inspired by his first name: Li, which means strength or power, and An, his last name, which means peace or safety. An has contributed to this mission by using geovisualization, modeling, and simulation to bridge the division between social science and ecological modeling that previously limited the capacity to address environmental issues that are inherently human influenced, for example, panda conservation and invasive species.

An's innovations include:

- Development of a digital, high performance, and 4-D holographic methodology for space-time representation and modeling. An actively applied these methods to address challenges spanning climate change, biodiversity and ecosystem services, wildlife habitat degradation, urban transition, and more.

- Development of a methodology fusing the eigenvector spatial filtering approach and geography latent trajectory analysis to filter out bias arising from spatial autocorrelation, introducing a new methodology to GIScience and transforming the field. This broadly applicable innovation addresses the grand challenge of spatial autocorrelation in space-time data.

- Generation of a subfield called land survival analysis. An has creatively woven survival analysis — typically used in social science disciplines to study the timing of discrete events — with modern GIScience methods.

An recently published a book, "Conservation Effectiveness and Concurrent Green Initiatives," in which he presents his discovery of concurrent green efforts — overlapping conservation efforts that may have positive synergies or negative interactions that may hamper conservation efforts. The work reflects An's exceptional interdisciplinary approach to addressing problems in sustainability. An's focus on merging the spatial and human-environment identities, in this book and across the rest of his work, concurrently advances subfields in geography while, more importantly, developing new subfields and methods that have greater capabilities for finding solutions for complex human-environment problems.

The AAG will celebrate the 2023 Honors recipients at an awards celebration on the evening of Sunday, March 26, 2023, during the AAG Annual Meeting in Denver, Colorado. For more information, visit the AAG website.