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(54) **IMAGE PROCESSING APPARATUS AND GRADATION REPRODUCTION METHOD**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this invention is to reproduce gradations of dark parts between devices with different ranges of reproducible brightness. The range of reproducible brightness by the printer is a range from Lblack to 100, and this is narrow in relation to the range of brightness that is able to be reproduced by the digital camera (0 to 100). An image processing apparatus converts the input brightness L_{input} on the input brightness graph L_{input} -graph to the output brightness L_{output} on the output brightness graph L_{output} -graph. Accordingly, the low brightness gradations 0 to Lblack of the input brightness L_{input} in relation to the input RGB values included in the range R1 become Lblack to L1, the dark area gradations are reproduced.

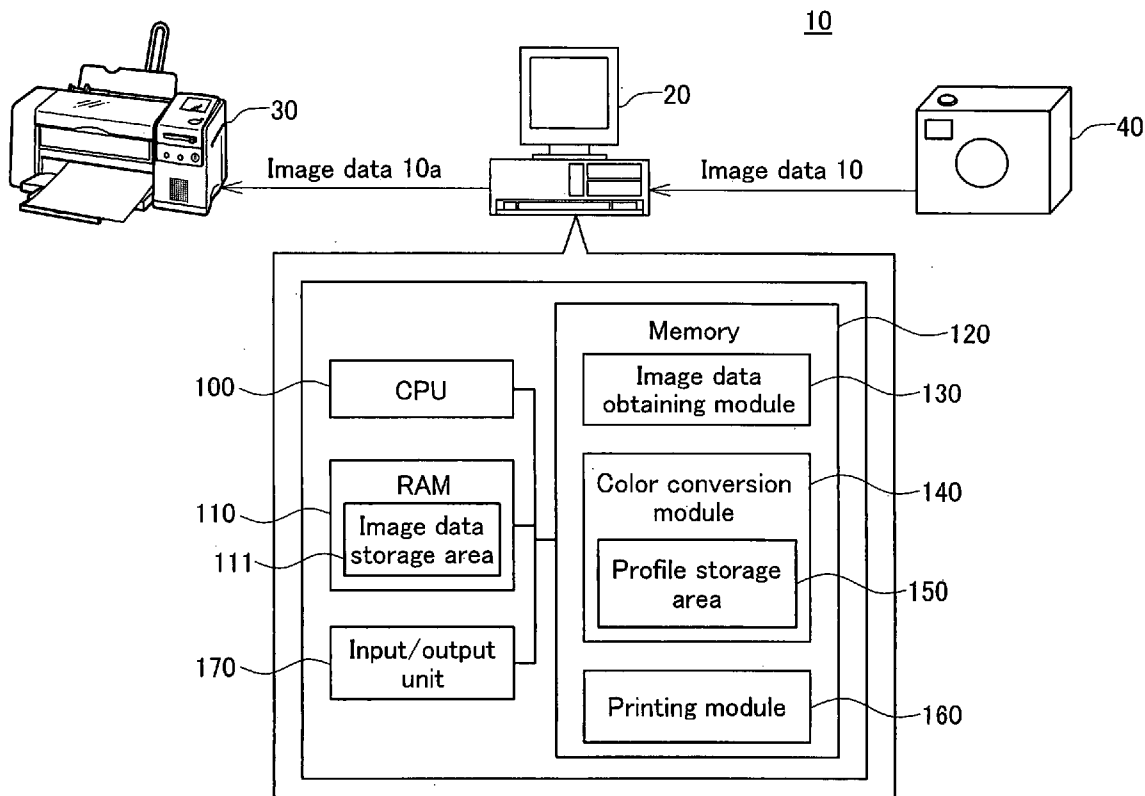
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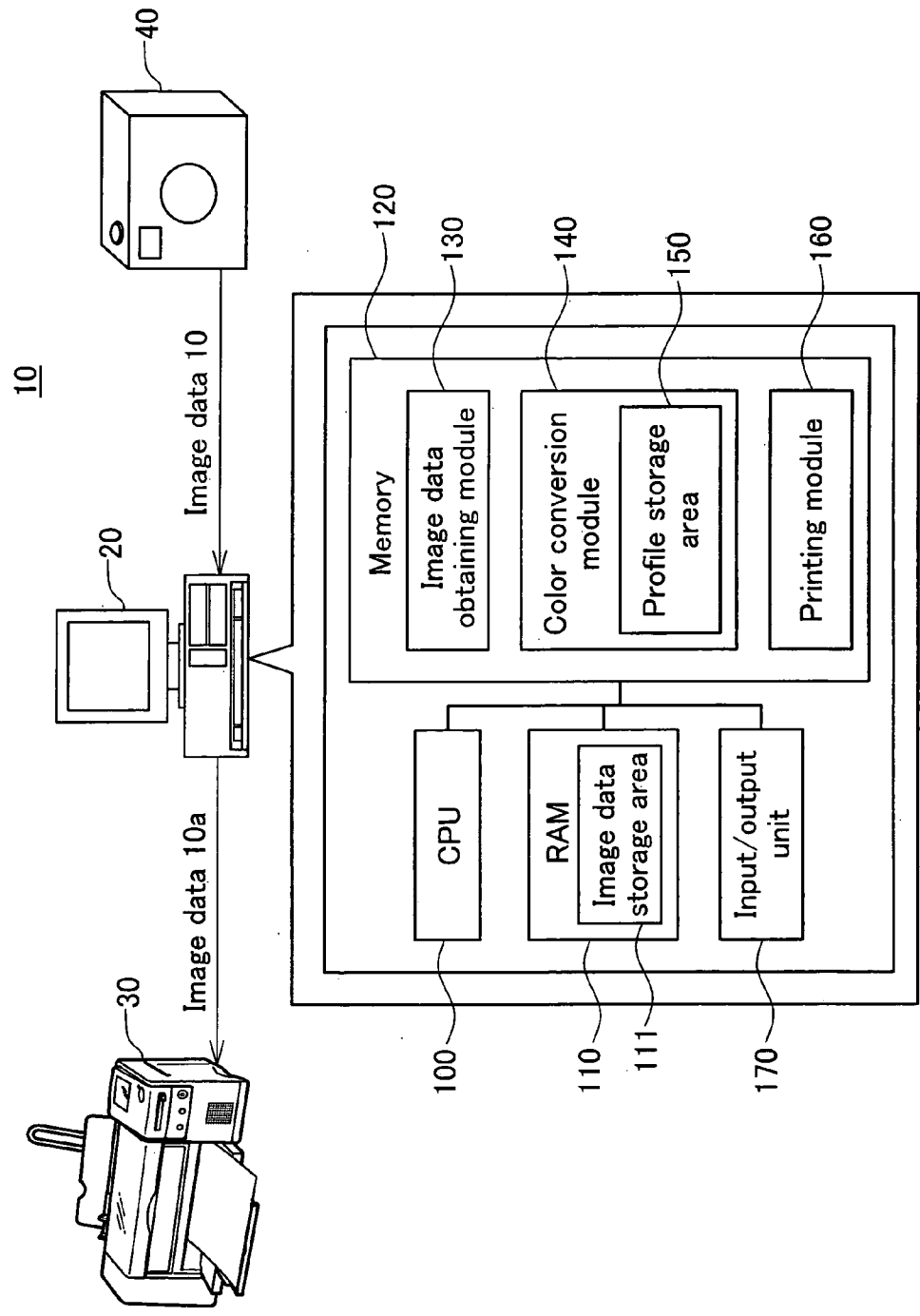


Fig.1

Fig.2

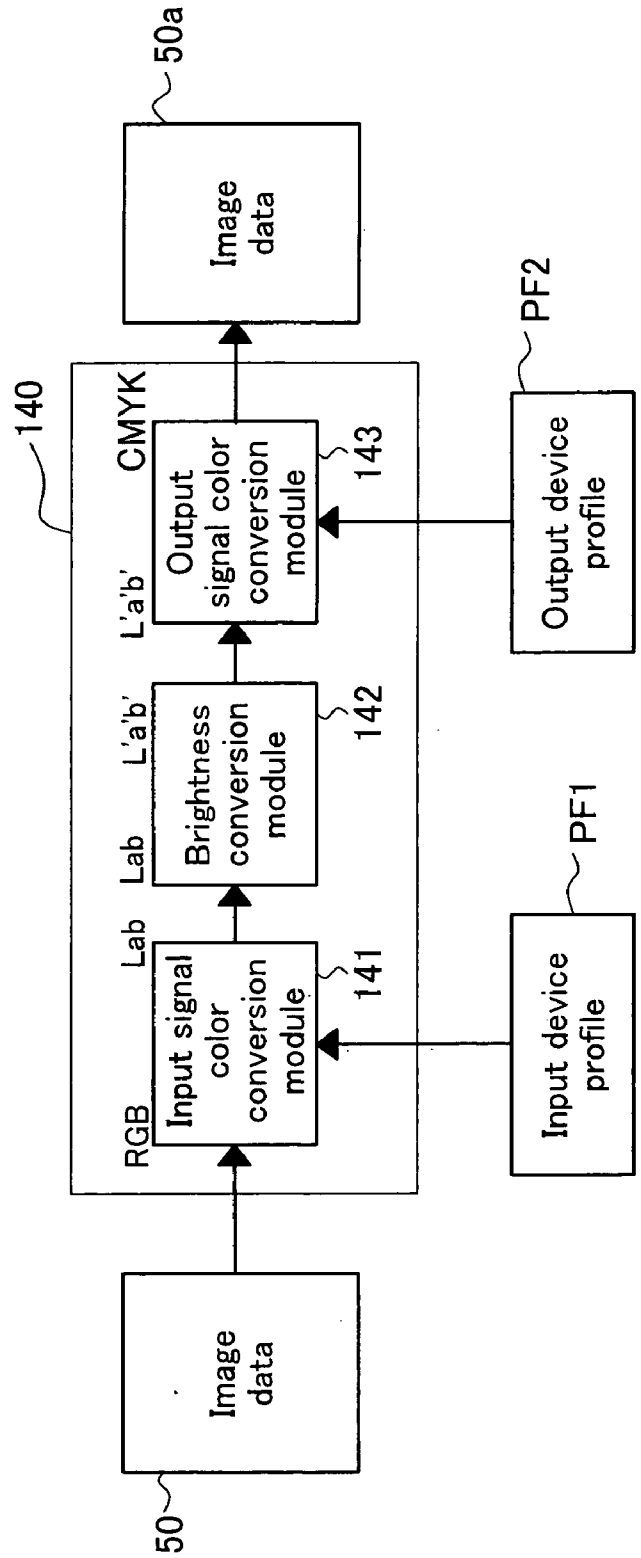


Fig.3

↙ PF1

PF11	Header	Device type: dsc
		Model name: DC-101
		Creation date and time: March 15, 2004
PF12	Device independent color space conversion information	RGB=0,0,0,0 Lab=90.6,98.2,80.9
		⋮
		RGB=255,255,255,255 Lab=0,0,0
PF13	Input device color space information	AdobeRGB

Fig.4

↙ PF2

PF21	Header	Device type: print
		Model name: PL-3000
		Creation date and time: January 15, 2005
PF22	Device independent color space conversion information	L'a'b=100,0,0 CMYK=0,0,0,0
		⋮
		L'a'b=0,0,0 CMYK=93,88,89,80
PF23	Input device color space information	CMYK

Fig.5

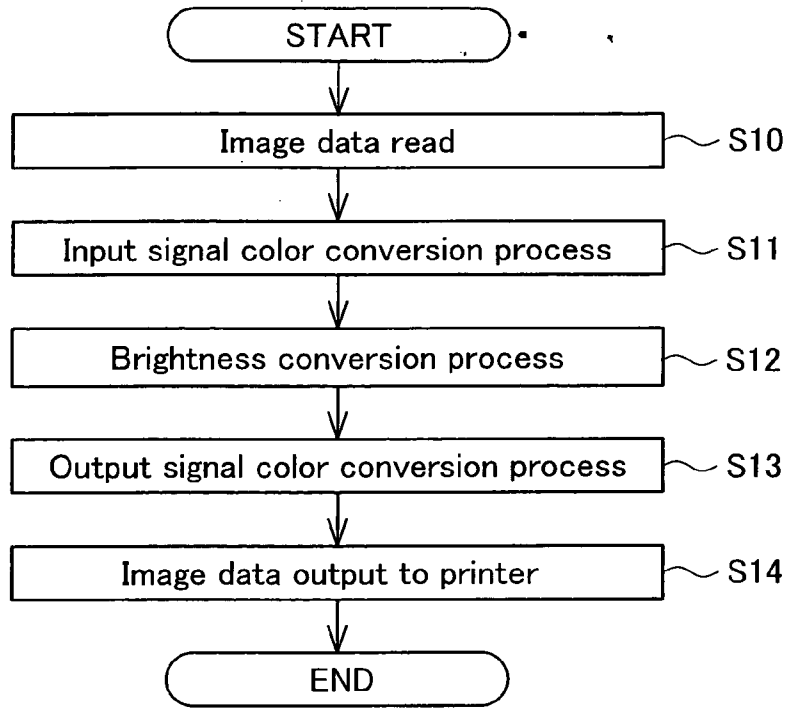


Fig.6

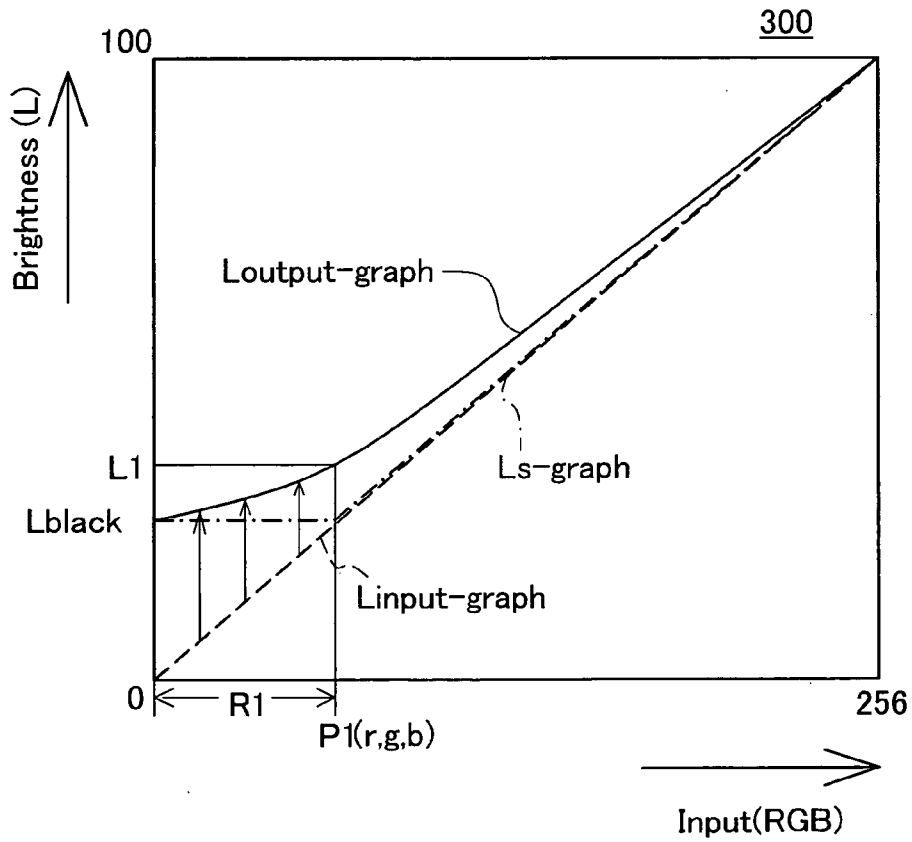


Fig.7

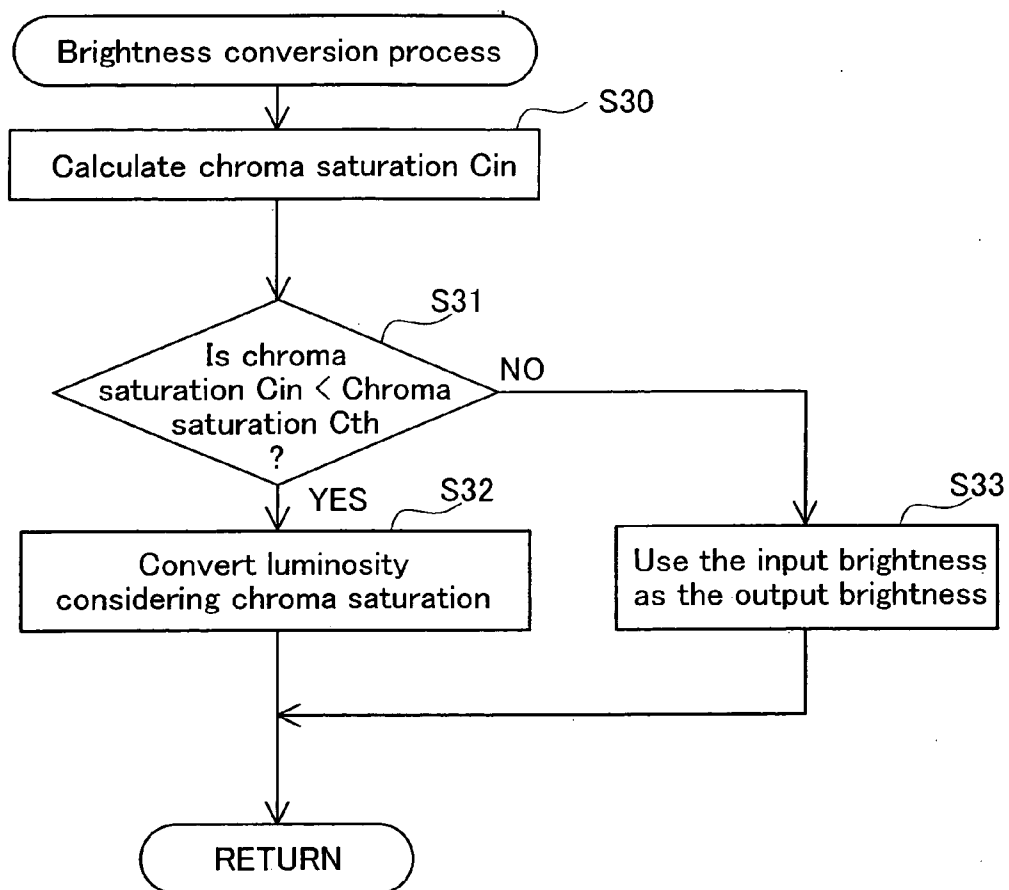


Fig.8

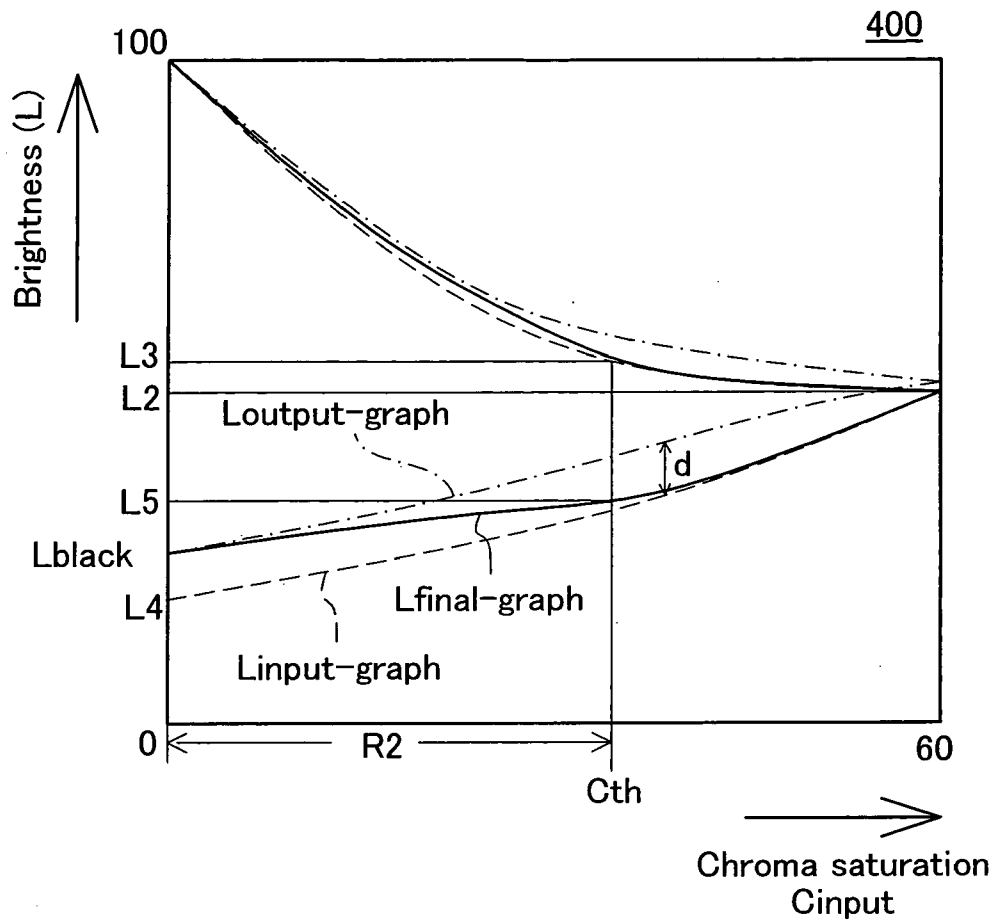


IMAGE PROCESSING APPARATUS AND GRADATION REPRODUCTION METHOD

BACK GROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] 1. Field of the Invention

[0002] This invention relates to brightness gradation reproduction between devices with different ranges of reproducible brightness.

[0003] 2. Description of the Related Art

[0004] A printing systems that have a digital camera and a printer have become popular. An image data shot by the digital camera is input to the printer and the printer prints images expressed by the image data in his printing systems Image data is expressed using the device dependent color space that is dependent on each device. For example, a digital camera expresses image data using the RGB color space that is the digital camera device dependent color space, and the printer expresses image data using the CMYK color space that is the printer device dependent color space. Image data expressed by the RGB color space is converted to image data expressed by the CMYK color space that is the printer device dependent color space and output to the printer.

[0005] The brightness range that is reproducible for each color space differs for each device. By correlating the reproducible brightness by the digital camera and the reproducible brightness by the printer, the gradations of the image data shot using the digital camera are reflected in the image output by the printer.

[0006] However, the range of reproducible brightness by the printer is narrower than the range of reproducible brightness by the digital camera, and of the reproducible brightness by the digital camera, all the brightness that is lower than the black point are converted to black points. The black point is the minimum value of the reproducible brightness by the printer. Because of that, there is a problem that low brightness gradations in image data are not able to be reproduced in the images printed by the printer.

[0007] The problem described above is not a problem specialized in cases when outputting image data shot using a digital camera to a printer to print an image, but a problem that occurs in the same way between devices for which the range of reproducible brightness by the device receiving the image data is narrower than the range of reproducible brightness by the device sending the image data.

[0008] This invention was carried on in view of these problems, and the purpose is to reproduce gradations of the part for which the image data has low brightness between devices for which the range of reproducible brightness by the device that receives the image data is narrower than the range of reproducible brightness by the device that sends the image data.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0009] In order to address at least part of the problem described above, a first aspect of this invention provides an image processing apparatus that outputs input image data that is input from an input device to an output device, wherein the input device has a input brightness area that is reproducible by the input device, wherein the output device

has a output brightness area narrower than the input brightness area and is reproducible by the output device. The image processing apparatus in the first aspect of the invention comprises: a first color conversion processing module that converts the input image data to first intermediate image data, wherein the input image data is expressed using a input device dependent color space that depends on the input device, wherein the first intermediate image data at least expresses the brightness of the input image data and is expressed by an device independent color space that does not depend on each device, a brightness conversion module that converts the first intermediate image data to second intermediate image data so that gradation of first brightness is expressed in the output brightness area, wherein the first brightness is, of the first intermediate data, at least lower than the minimum value of the output brightness area, and a second color conversion processing module that converts the second intermediate data to output image data to output to the output device, wherein the output image data is expressed using an output device dependent color space that depends on the output device.

[0010] According to the image processing apparatus in the first aspect of this invention, it is possible to reproduce in the output image data the gradations of input brightness that is lower than the minimum value of the output brightness area in the input image data. Therefore, it is possible to ensure the gradation of the dark part of image data output by output device.

[0011] A second aspect of this invention provides a gradation reproduction method. The method is implemented by an image processing apparatus that outputs input image data that is input from an input device to an output device, wherein the input device has a input brightness area that is reproducible by the input device, wherein the output device has a output brightness area narrower than the input brightness area and is reproducible by the output device the gradation reproduction method comprising the steps of, The gradation reproduction method in the second aspect of the invention comprises the steps of: converting the input image data to first intermediate image data, wherein the input image data is expressed using a input device dependent color space that depends on the input device, wherein the first intermediate image data at least expresses the brightness of the input image data and is expressed by an device independent color space that does not depend on each device, converting the first intermediate image data to second intermediate image data so that gradation of first brightness is expressed in the output brightness area, wherein the first brightness is, of the first intermediate data at least lower than the minimum value of the output brightness area, and converting the second intermediate data to output image data to output to the output device, wherein the output image data is expressed using an output device dependent color space that depends on the output device.

[0012] The image processing apparatus in the second aspect of this invention may provides the same action and effect as the image processing apparatus in the first aspect of this invention. The image processing apparatus in the second aspect of this invention may also be realized in a variety of ways in the same manners as the image processing apparatus in the first aspect of this invention.

[0013] These and other objects, features, aspects, and advantages of the present invention will become more

apparent from the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0014] **FIG. 1** exemplary illustrates an example of an image output system in the first embodiment.

[0015] **FIG. 2** exemplary illustrates a block chart describing the color conversion process in the first embodiment.

[0016] **FIG. 3** exemplary illustrates an example of the contents of the input device profile in the first embodiment.

[0017] **FIG. 4** exemplary illustrates an example of the contents of the output device profile of the first embodiment.

[0018] **FIG. 5** exemplary illustrates a flow chart describing the printing process in the first embodiment.

[0019] **FIG. 6** exemplary illustrates a brightness graph representing the brightness gradation in the first embodiment.

[0020] **FIG. 7** exemplary illustrates a flow chart describing the brightness conversion process in the second embodiment.

[0021] **FIG. 8** exemplary illustrates a brightness graph representing the brightness gradation in the second embodiment.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

[0022] Following, embodiment aspects of the invention are described based on the following embodiments with references to the drawings.

A. First Embodiment

A1. System Configuration:

[0023] **FIG. 1** exemplary illustrates an image output system **10** in the first embodiment. The image output system **10** has an image processing apparatus **20**, a printer **30**, and a digital camera **40**. The digital camera **40** and the image processing apparatus **20** and the printer **30** are respectively connected locally via a USB cable. The image processing apparatus **20** converts the image data **50** so as to be reproduced in the image on which the gradations of the brightness of image data **50** obtained from the digital camera **40** is printed with printer **30**. The image processing apparatus **20** outputs the converted image data **50a** to the printer **30**.

[0024] The image processing apparatus **20** is a typical personal computer equipped with a CPU, RAM, and ROM. The functional blocks of the image processing apparatus are illustrated in the **FIG. 1**. Each functional block is controlled by the CPU **100**. The memory **120** stores an image data obtaining module **130**, a color conversion module **140**, a profile storage area **150** and a printing module **160**. Each functional block is implemented using software. Each functional block may be constituted using hardware. The RAM **110** is readable/writable memory. The image data recording area **111** is constituted as part of the RAM **110**.

[0025] An input/output unit **170** sends and receives image data between the printer **30** and the digital camera **40**.

[0026] The image data obtaining module **130** records the image data **50** obtained from the digital camera **40** onto the image data recording area **111**.

[0027] An input device profile PF1 and an output device profile PF2 are stored in the profile storage area **150**. The input device profile PF1 includes the color conversion information from the device dependent color space of the digital camera **40** that is the input device to the device independent color space. Also, the output device profile PF2 includes the color conversion information from the device independent color space to the device dependent color space of the printer **30** that is the output device.

[0028] The color conversion module **140** uses the input device profile PF1 and the output device profile PF2 to convert the color space of the image data **50** from the device dependent color space that depends on the digital camera **40** as the input device to the device dependent color space that depends on the printer **30** as the output device. Converting the color space means converting each pixel value of the pixels that constitute the image data **50** expressed by the device dependent color space that depends on the digital camera **40** to each of the pixel values of the image data **50a** expressed by the device dependent color space that depends on the printer **30**. The conversion process implemented by the color conversion module **140** is described later.

[0029] The printing module **160** converts the image data **50a** converted by the color conversion module **140** to a format that is able to be interpreted by the printer **30**, and outputs the converted image data **50a** that is converted by printing module **160** to the printer **30** via the input/output unit **170**.

[0030] **FIG. 2** exemplary illustrates a block chart that describes the color conversion process implemented by the color conversion module **140** in the first embodiment. The color conversion module **140** has an input signal color conversion module **141**, a brightness conversion module **142**, and an output signal color conversion module **143**. The input signal color conversion module **141** correlates to the "first color conversion module" of this invention. The brightness conversion module **142** correlates to the "brightness conversion module" of this invention. The output signal color conversion module **143** correlates to the "second color conversion module" of the first embodiment. In the first embodiment, the device dependent color space of the digital camera **40** that is the input device is the RGB color space, and the pixel values of each pixel of the image data expressed by the RGB color space are expressed as (R, G, B). The device independent color space is the Lab color space and the image values of each pixel of the image data expressed by the Lab color spaces are expressed as (L, a, b). "L" represents brightness, and "a" and "b" represent chromaticity. The device dependent color space of the printer **30** that is the output device is the CMYK color space, and the pixel values of each pixel of the image data expressed by the CMYK color space are expressed as (C, M, Y, K).

[0031] The input signal color conversion module **141** implements color conversion processing from the device dependent color space of the input device, specifically, the digital camera **40**, to the device independent color space. In specific terms, the input signal color conversion module **141** obtains from the input device profile PF1 the information for color conversion from the device dependent color space of the input device to the device independent color space. The input signal color conversion module **141** uses the obtained color conversion information to convert image data expressed using the RGB color space color space to image data expressed using the Lab color space. The color conversion information includes a color conversion table from

the RGB color space to the Lab color space. The input signal color conversion module 141 uses the color conversion table to convert each pixel value of the image data 50 from (R, G, B) expressed using the RGB color space to (L, a, b) expressed using the Lab color space. It is also possible to include in the color conversion information an RGB-Lab color conversion matrix, for example.

[0032] The contents of the input device profile PF1 are described with reference to the FIG. 3. FIG. 3 exemplarily illustrates of the contents of the input device profile PF1 in the first embodiment. The input device profile PF1 includes a header part PF11, device independent color space conversion information PF12, and input device color space information PF13. The header part PF11 includes the device type indicating the type of input device, the model name, and the creation date and time of the input device profile PF1. The device independent color space conversion information PF12 includes an RGB-Lab color conversion table as the color conversion information necessary for converting the image data 50 expressed using the device dependent color space (RGB color space) of the digital camera 40 that is the input device to the image data 50 expressed using the device independent color space (Lab color space).

[0033] The color space information PF13 includes information relating to the color space that the digital camera, which is the input device, is able to reproduce. The input device profile PF1 is stored in the memory 120 together with installation of the input device driver. The input device profile PF1 is able to be supplied correlated to the image data 50, for example.

[0034] The brightness conversion module 142, in the Lab color space that is the device independent color space, converts the input brightness L of the image data 50 and calculates the output brightness L' so that the gradation of the reproducible brightness by the input device is reproduced within the range of reproducible brightness by the output device.

[0035] Though an illustration is omitted in FIG. 3, the color conversion module 140 includes a color area mapping module to correlate of the input color area expressing the reproducible range of chromaticity by the input device and the output color area that expresses the range of reproducible chromaticity by the output device. The color area mapping module converts the chromaticity (a, b) of the image data 50 to the chromaticity (a', b'), wherein the chromaticity (a, b) is expressed by the reproducible color area by the digital camera that is the input device, and the chromaticity (a', b') is expressed by the reproducible color area by the printer that is the output device.

[0036] The pixel values of the image data 50 are converted (L, a, b) to (L', a', b') by the brightness conversion module 142 and the color area mapping module.

[0037] The output signal color conversion module 143 implements color conversion processing from the device independent space to the device dependent color space of the digital camera 40 that is the output device. In specific terms, the output signal color conversion module 143 obtains the color conversion information from the output device profile PF2. The output device profile PF2 includes information to convert from the device independent color space of the output device to the device dependent color space. The output signal color conversion module 143 uses the obtained color conversion information to convert image data expressed using the Lab color space color space to image

data expressed using the CMYK color space. The color conversion information includes a color conversion table from the Lab color space to the CMYK color space. The output signal color conversion module 143 uses the color conversion table to convert each pixel value of the image data 50 from (L', a', b') expressed by the Lab color space to (C, M, Y, K) expressed by the CMYK color space. It is also possible to include in the color conversion information a Lab-CMYK color conversion matrix, for example.

[0038] The contents of the output device profile PF2 are described using FIG. 4. FIG. 4 exemplarily illustrates an example of the contents of the output device profile PF2 in the first embodiment. The output device profile PF2 has the same constitution as the input device profile PF1, and consists of a header part PF21, device independent color space conversion information PF22, and input device color space information PF23. The header part PF21 includes the device type that indicates the input device type, the model name, and the creation date and time of the output device profile PF2. The device independent color space information PF22 includes the Lab-CMYK color conversion table as color conversion information necessary to confer the image data 50 expressed by the device independent color space (Lab color space) to image data 50a expressed by the device dependent color space (CMYK color space) of the printer 30 that is the output device. The color space information PF23 includes information relating to the reproducible color space by the printer which is the output device.

A2. Printing Process:

[0039] FIG. 5 exemplarily illustrates a flow chart for describing the printing process in the first embodiment. The image processing apparatus 20 starts this printing process with printing instructions from the user as the trigger. When the image processing apparatus 20 receives the printing instructions from the user, the image processing apparatus 20 reads the image data recorded in the image data recording area 111 (step S10), implements input signal color conversion processing, and converts each pixel value (R, G, B) of the image data 50 expressed by the RGB color space to (L, a, b) expressed by the Lab color space (step S11).

[0040] The image processing apparatus 20 implements color area and brightness conversion on each pixel value (L, a, b) of the image data 50 expressed by the Lab color space, and converts each pixel value to (L', a', b') (step S12). In the first embodiment, only the selected input brightness L_{input} that is the brightness of the achromatic pixels of the pixels of the image data 50 are converted to the output brightness L_{output} using the equation 3 shown below.

[Equation 3] (Equation 3)

$$L_{output} = (L_{max} - L_{black}) \left(\frac{L_{input}}{L_{max}} \right)^\gamma + L_{black}$$

$$\gamma = \frac{L_{max}}{L_{max} - L_{black}}$$

L_{max} : Maximum value of brightness for the Lab color space

L_{black} : Minimum value of the reproducible brightness by the printer

L_{input} : selected input brightness

L_{output} : Output brightness

[0041] Gradation change by the input brightness conversion process is described in reference to FIG. 6. FIG. 6 exemplarily illustrates a brightness graph 300 that expresses brightness gradation changes in the first embodiment. The horizontal axis of the brightness graph 300 represents the RGB value of the input image data 50, and the vertical axis represents the output brightness L of the image data. For the input RGB values, each value (R, G, B) changes in sequence from (0, 0, 0) to (1, 1, 1) (2, 2, 2) . . . (255, 255, 255). The output brightness L_{output} has a range from 0 to 100. L_{black} that represents the minimum value of the reproducible brightness by the printer 30 which is the output device shows black points that are the darkest spots of the brightness.

[0042] The input brightness graph L_{input} shows the reproducible brightness by the digital camera 40 for the input RGB values. As shown in FIG. 6, as the input RGB value increases, the output brightness L gradually becomes higher, in other words, as the input RGB value increases, the brightness is higher. The output brightness graph L_s shows the reproducible output brightness L_{out} by the printer 30 when using the conventional method. The output brightness graph L_{output} is a graph representing the output brightness L_{output} calculated applying equation 3 in the first embodiment to the input RGB values.

[0043] The range of reproducible brightness by the printer 30 is a range from L_{black} to 100, and is narrower than the range of reproducible brightness by the digital camera 40 (0 to 100). Because of that, with the conventional brightness conversion processing, as shown in the output brightness graph L_s , when the RGB values of each pixel value of the input image data is included in the range R1 from (0, 0, 0) to the P1 (r, g, b), all of the input brightness L_{input} are converted to L_{black} , and the gradations of the input brightness L_{input} are not reproduced with the output brightness L_{out} .

[0044] In the first embodiment, by the brightness conversion module 142 implementing the brightness conversion process applying equation 3, the output brightness graph L_{output} -graph is obtained as a graph representing brightness that is able to be reproduced by the printer 30. By applying the equation 3, as shown by the arrow, the brightness conversion module 142 converts the input brightness L_{input} on the input brightness graph L_{input} -graph to the output brightness L_{output} on the output brightness graph L_{output} -graph. Specifically, the brightness conversion module 142 reproduces as L_{black} to L1 the low brightness gradations from 0 to L_{black} of the input brightness L_{input} for the input RGB values included in the range R1.

[0045] According to the image processing apparatus of the first embodiment described above, by applying equation 3, even when the range of reproducible brightness by the printer that is the output device is narrower than the range of reproducible brightness by the digital camera that is the input device, it is possible to reproduce the gradations of the brightness of the image data shot using the digital camera in the image printed using the printer. Conventionally, of the image data brightness, brightness lower than the black points of the printer were all converted to printer black points, and with images output by the printer, low brightness gradations were not expressed, but with this invention, it is possible to express gradation of low brightness of image data shot using the digital camera for images output by the printer.

[0046] Also, equation 3 is applied not only to low brightness input brightness but to all the input brightness, so for

reproducible brightness by the printer, it is possible to ensure gradation properties for the low brightness part and also to reproduce gradations smoothly for all the brightness.

B. Second Embodiment

[0047] With the first embodiment described above, by applying equation 3 to the achromatic input brightness, the gradation properties of the reproducible brightness by the printer are ensured. In the second embodiment, considering chroma saturation, the gradations of the brightness in a digital camera are reproduced in the range for which brightness is able to be reproduced by the printer. The system configuration in the second embodiment is the same as the system configuration in the first embodiment.

B1. Brightness Conversion Process:

[0048] FIG. 7 exemplarily illustrates a flow chart for describing the brightness conversion process in the second embodiment. This brightness conversion process is implemented by the brightness conversion module 142, and correlates to the process of step S12 in FIG. 5.

[0049] The brightness conversion module 142 calculates the input chroma saturation C_{input} of each pixel value of the image data expressed using the Lab color space (step S30). The brightness conversion module 142 calculates the input chroma saturation C_{input} by applying the equation 4 below.

[Equation 4]

$$C_{input} = \sqrt{a_{input}^2 + b_{input}^2} \tag{Equation 4}$$

(Where a_{input} and b_{input} are the “a” and “b” values of the input pixels for the Lab color space)

[0050] The brightness conversion module 142 determines whether the input chroma saturation C_{input} is lower than the chroma saturation threshold value C_{th} (step S31). The chroma saturation threshold value C_{th} represents $\frac{2}{3}$ of the lowest chroma saturation value for the outside edge of the chromaticity of the Lab color space. When the input chroma saturation C_{input} is lower than the chroma saturation threshold value C_{th} (step S31: Yes), the brightness conversion module 142 converts input brightness L_{input} to the output brightness L_{output} by in consideration of the chroma saturation brightness (step S32). In specific terms, the brightness conversion module 142 calculates the output brightness L_{final} by applying the equation 5 below. Specifically, with a range for which the input chroma saturation C_{input} is from 0 to the chroma saturation threshold value C_{th} , the output brightness L_{final} is calculated by varying the mixture ratio of the input brightness L_{input} and the output brightness L_{output} . Note that L_{output} is the value calculated by applying equation 3 in the first embodiment, and correlates to the “tentative output brightness” for this invention.

[Equation 5]

(Equation 5)

$$L_{final} = \left(L_{input} * \left(\frac{C_{input}}{C_{max}} \right) \right) + \left(L_{output} * \left(\frac{C_{max} - C_{input}}{C_{max}} \right) \right)$$

C_{th} : Chroma saturation threshold value for the Lab color space

L_{final} : Output brightness after conversion

[0051] When the input chroma saturation C_{input} is the chroma saturation threshold value C_{th} or greater (step S31:

No), the brightness conversion module 142 uses the input brightness L_{input} as is as the output brightness L_{final} applying equation 6 (step S33). Specifically, with the range for which the input chroma saturation C_{input} is from the chroma saturation threshold value C_{th} to the chroma saturation maximum value, the input brightness L_{input} is used as the output brightness L_{final} .

[Equation 6]

$$L_{final}=L_{input} \quad (\text{Equation 6})$$

[0052] Gradation reproduction considering chroma saturation is described with reference to FIG. 8. FIG. 8 exemplarily illustrates a brightness graph 400 representing brightness gradation changes in the second embodiment. The horizontal axis of the brightness graph 400 represents the input chroma saturation C_{input} of the image data 50, and the vertical axis represents the brightness L of the image data. The input chroma saturation C_{input} uses a value in the range from 0 to 60. The brightness L uses a value in the range from 0 to 100. Lblack representing the minimum value of the reproducible brightness by the printer 30 that is the output device shows the darkest point of the brightness, in other words, black points. In the second embodiment, described is an example of a color for which the brightness is L4 when the input chroma saturation C_{input} is 0.

[0053] The input brightness graph L_{input} -graph shows the reproducible input brightness L_{input} by the digital camera 40 for the input chroma saturation C_{input} . As shown in FIG. 8, with the digital camera 40, as the input chroma saturation C_{input} increases from 0 to 60, the brightness L also gradually increases from L4 to L2 and as the input chroma saturation C_{input} gradually decreases from 60 to 0, the brightness L increases from L2 to 100.

[0054] The output brightness graph L_{output} -graph shows the reproducible output brightness L_{output} by the printer 30 on the chroma saturation C_{input} . The output brightness L_{output} is calculated applying equation 3 in the first embodiment. The output brightness graph L_{final} -graph shows the reproducible output brightness L_{final} by the printer 30 on the input chroma saturation C_{input} . The output brightness L_{final} is calculated applying equation 5 in the second embodiment.

[0055] When brightness conversion processing is implemented applying only equation 3 in the first embodiment, as shown in the output brightness graph L_{output} -graph, as the chroma saturation increases, the output brightness L_{output} has a higher value than the input brightness L_{input} , with the result that and the brightness is not reproduced appropriately.

[0056] In the second embodiment, by the brightness conversion processing module 142 implementing brightness conversion processing applying equation 5, the output brightness graph L_{final} -graph is obtained showing the output brightness L_{final} . As shown in the brightness graph 400, as the input chroma saturation C_{input} increases from 0 to the chroma saturation threshold value C_{th} , the output brightness L_{final} increases from Lblack to L5 so that the gradations of the input brightness L_{input} are reproduced. As the input chroma saturation C_{input} increases from the chroma saturation threshold value C_{th} to 60, the output brightness L_{final} uses the same value as the input brightness L_{input} , and increases from L5 to L2. Even the part for which the input chroma saturation C_{input} becomes lower from 60 to the chroma saturation threshold C_{th} , the output brightness L_{final} uses the same value as the input brightness L_{input} and increases from L2 to L3. As the input chroma saturation C_{input} decreases

from the chroma saturation threshold value C_{th} to 0, the output brightness L_{final} increases from L3 to 100.

[0057] In the second embodiment, when the input chroma saturation C_{input} is less than the chroma saturation threshold value C_{th} , the mixture ratio of the input brightness L_{input} and the output brightness L_{output} is varied to calculate the output brightness L_{final} and the condition branching midway in the calculation is simplified, but when the input chroma saturation C_{input} changes decreasingly from a maximum value of 60 to 0, the same as when the input chroma saturation C_{input} is the chroma saturation threshold value C_{th} or greater, it is also possible to use the input brightness L_{input} as the output brightness L_{final} . This is because in the range for which the brightness is high, it is possible for the printer 30 to reproduce the input brightness L_{input} without converting the input brightness L_{input} .

[0058] According to the image processing apparatus in the second embodiment described above, in the low chroma saturation area, in other words, the low chroma saturation area near the achromatic axis, the ratio of the output brightness L_{output} is made higher than the input brightness L_{input} to mix the input brightness L_{input} and the output brightness L_{output} , as the input chroma saturation C_{input} comes closer to the chroma saturation threshold value C_{th} , by making the ratio of the input brightness L_{input} higher than the output brightness L_{output} and mixing the input brightness L_{input} and the output brightness L_{output} , it is possible to reproduce the gradations of the image data brightness with good precision. Also, in the high chroma saturation area, it is possible to use the input brightness as is as the output brightness, and it is possible to improve the precision of gradation reproduction.

C. Variation Embodiments

[0059] (1) In the first embodiment described above, the Lab color space was used as the device independent color space, but it is also possible to use the LUV color space or the YCrCb color space. It is acceptable as long as it is a device independent color space that uses brightness as one of the components.

[0060] (2) In the second embodiment described above, the chroma saturation threshold value C_{th} was set as $\frac{2}{3}$ the chroma saturation value of the lowest chroma saturation value for the outside edge of the chroma saturation of the Lab color space, but it is also possible to use $\frac{1}{2}$ the chroma saturation value of the lowest chroma saturation value, for example. The chroma saturation maximum value and the color area characteristics differ for each device, so it is preferable to set the chroma saturation maximum value and the chroma saturation threshold value C_{th} according to the device.

[0061] Above, various embodiments of the invention were described, but the invention is not limited to these embodiments, and it is clearly possible to have various constitutions in a range that does not stray from its key points.

[0062] The Japanese patent applications as the basis of the priority claim of this application are incorporated in the disclosure here of by reference:

[0063] (1) Japanese Patent Application No. 2005-90765(filing data: Mar. 28, 2005).

What is claimed is:

1. An image processing apparatus that outputs input image data to an output device, wherein the input image data is input from an input device, wherein the input device has

a input brightness area that is reproducible by the input device, wherein the output device has a output brightness area narrower than the input brightness area and is reproducible by the output device, the image processing apparatus comprising:

a first color conversion processing module that converts the input image data to first intermediate image data, wherein the input image data is expressed using a input device dependent color space that depends on the input device, wherein the first intermediate image data at least expresses the brightness of the input image data and is expressed by an device independent color space that does not depend on each device,

a brightness conversion module that converts the first intermediate image data to second intermediate image data so that gradation of first brightness is expressed in the output brightness area, wherein the first brightness is, of the first intermediate data, at least lower than the minimum value of the output brightness area, and

a second color conversion processing module that converts the second intermediate data to output image data to output to the output device, wherein the output image data is expressed using an output device dependent color space that depends on the output device.

2. The image processing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein the brightness conversion module converts the first brightness to second brightness of the second intermediate data by applying the equation 1 to the first brightness.

[Equation 1] (Equation 1)

$$L_{output} = (L_{max} - L_{black}) \left(\frac{L_{input}}{L_{max}} \right)^\gamma + L_{black}$$

$$\gamma = \frac{L_{max}}{L_{max} - L_{black}}$$

L_{max} : Maximum value of the brightness in the device independent color space L_{black} : Minimum value of the brightness that the output device is reproducible L_{input} : First brightness of the first intermediate data L_{output} : Second brightness

3. The image processing apparatus according to claim 2, wherein

the brightness conversion module comprises:

the brightness conversion module converts the first brightness to second brightness of the second intermediate data by applying the equation 1 to the first brightness.

a tentative output brightness obtaining module that obtains tentative brightness by applying the equation 1 to the first brightness,

a chroma saturation obtaining module that obtains input chroma saturation that represents the vividness of the first intermediate data, and

a chroma saturation determination module that determines whether the input chroma saturation is chroma saturation threshold value or below in the independent color space, wherein the chroma saturation threshold value represents a specified chroma saturation, and

a conversion module that converts the first brightness to second brightness using the first brightness and the tentative brightness in consideration of the chroma saturation and the chroma saturation threshold value when it is determined that the chroma saturation is lower than the chroma saturation threshold value.

4. The image processing apparatus according to claim 3, wherein

the conversion module converts the first brightness to the second brightness applying equation 2.

[Equation 2] (Equation 2)

$$L_{final} = \left(L_{input} * \left(\frac{C_{input}}{C_{max}} \right) \right) + \left(L_{output} * \left(\frac{C_{max} - C_{input}}{C_{max}} \right) \right)$$

C_{input} : Chroma saturation of the first intermediate image data

C_{max} : Chroma saturation threshold value

L_{final} : Second brightness

5. The image processing apparatus according to claim 3, wherein

the conversion module uses the first brightness as the second brightness when it is determined that the chroma saturation is the chroma saturation threshold value or higher.

6. The image processing apparatus according to claim 4, wherein

the conversion module uses the first brightness as the second brightness when it is determined that the chroma saturation is the chroma saturation threshold value or higher.

7. A gradation reproduction method by an image processing apparatus, wherein the image processing apparatus that outputs input image data that is input from an input device to an output device, wherein the input device has a input brightness area that is reproducible by the input device, wherein the output device has a output brightness area narrower than the input brightness area and is reproducible by the output device the gradation reproduction method comprising the steps of,

converting the input image data to first intermediate image data, wherein the input image data is expressed using a input device dependent color space that depends on the input device, wherein the first intermediate image data at least expresses the brightness of the input image data and is expressed by an device independent color space that does not depend on each device,

converting the first intermediate image data to second intermediate image data so that gradation of first brightness is expressed in the output brightness area, wherein the first brightness is, of the first intermediate data at least lower than the minimum value of the output brightness area, and

converting the second intermediate data to output image data to output to the output device, wherein the output image data is expressed using an output device dependent color space that depends on the output device.

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