

Alex J. Chan

alexjchan.com | +44 (0) 777 112 8977 | me@alexjchan.com
LinkedIn: alexjchan | GitHub: XanderJC

I am interested in developing **safe** and **robust** machine learning systems that behave in the way we expect, and thus able to work with humans effectively. My work has often explored **inverse reinforcement learning** and **imitation learning** in order to learn from humans, and I'm interested in using this knowledge and **generative AI** to create insight and develop **personalised, human-centric**, decision making systems.

EXPERIENCE

Spotify

London, UK

Research Scientist Intern - Satisfaction, Interaction and Algorithms (SIA) team

Jun. 2023 - Present

- Project on improving the podcast content moderation pipeline by incorporating large language models (LLMs).
- Created various cultural media datasets through web-scraping in order to finetune a family of LLMs to be more aware of transient news and location/cultural specific issues to improve detection of potential violative content.
- Incorporated explanations from multiple cultural models to generate personalised guidance to content moderators, especially in the case when there is a cultural mismatch between the moderator and original content.

Stanford Existential Risk Initiative

Berkeley, CA

Researcher

Nov. 2022 - Jun. 2023

- Working with Dr Owain Evans (University of Oxford / Ought) examining LLMs, in particular their ability and willingness to be deceptive and how that might be detected with only black-box query knowledge.
- Designed and implemented experiments in Python using LLMs with various APIs and HuggingFace models.
- Finetuned and ran large (up to 65 billion parameters) models on remote servers with extensive shell scripting using various distributed computing packages including PyTorch Distributed and DeepSpeed.

Microsoft Research

Cambridge, UK

PhD Scholar

Oct. 2020 - Present

- Student researcher co-supervised by Dr Aditya Nori (previously Dr Danielle Belgrave before she joined DeepMind) "A Smart Care System for Healthcare using Contextual Reinforcement Learning".

University of Cambridge

Cambridge, UK

Research Assistant - van der Schaar lab

Dec 2019. - Aug. 2020

- Research project on uncertainty calibration in Bayesian neural networks under distributional shift.
- Developed a novel method for improving calibration in transfer learning - resulted in publication at ICML.

University College London

London, UK

Research Assistant

Jun. - Aug. 2018

- Worked with Dr Sam Livingstone on a research project during the summer on Markov chain Monte Carlo, specifically comparing theoretical bounds with traditional practical convergence diagnostics.
- Implemented a variety of MCMC samplers and diagnostic methods in Python, and ran experiments to compare their output with recently proposed theoretical bounds.

EDUCATION

University of Cambridge

Cambridge, UK

PhD Machine Learning - Supervisor: Professor Mihaela van der Schaar

Oct. 2020 - Present

- Understanding decision making through interpretable imitation learning and inverse reinforcement learning.
- First-author publications in all three of the major machine learning conferences: ICML, NeurIPS, and ICLR.
- In total my published work has been cited over 100 times, and I have an h-index of 6.

MPhil Machine Learning and Machine Intelligence

Oct. 2019 - Sep. 2020

- Awarded with Commendation and an average of 79%. 92% for my thesis "Interpretable Policy Learning" - developing interpretable imitation learning algorithms for decision making in high stakes environments.
- Taught component focusing on probabilistic machine learning, with modules on natural language processing, reinforcement learning, and computational neuroscience.

University College London

London, UK

BSc Statistics

Oct. 2016 - June 2019

- 1st Class Honours - 81% average. Achieved 84% on my final year project on probabilistic deep learning, focusing on flexible Bayesian approximations in deep neural networks.
- Modules include significant mathematical and statistical content covering probability, linear models, mathematical analysis, and advanced linear algebra.

AWARDS/PRIZES

- Stanford Existential Risk Initiative Machine Learning Alignment Theory Scholarship** (20k USD)
- Scholarship funding for research project on how large language models can lie when articulating decision rules.
- Microsoft Research PhD Scholarship** (≈160k GBP)
- Received the award for full funding of my PhD co-supervised with Microsoft Research (Dr Aditya Nori, and Dr Danielle Belgrave) “A Smart Care System for Healthcare using Contextual Reinforcement Learning”.
- G-Research PhD Prize in Maths and Data Science** (7k GBP)
- Runner up in the G-Research competition for best draft PhD dissertation.
- Optiver Hex Cambridge Hackathon Challenge**
- Developed an algorithmic trading strategy for market making a dual listed product on an Optiver proprietary exchange, beating out about 40 teams.
- EPSRC Vacation Grant** (≈2k GBP)
- Awarded funding grant by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council to conduct a research project during the summer on Markov chain Monte Carlo methods.

SKILLS

Machine Languages: Python, R, MATLAB, PostgreSQL, HTML.

Human Languages: English, Conversational French.

Libraries/Tools: PyTorch, JAX, TensorFlow, Transformers, DeepSpeed, pandas, NumPy, Matplotlib, Git, Azure, GCP.

SUPERVISION

- University of Cambridge** Cambridge, UK
MPhil Machine Learning and Machine Intelligence Theses Mar. – Aug. 2021
- **Tennison Liu:** *Fair Policy Learning*. (Work published at AFCEP 2022).
 - **Alizée Pace:** *Adaptive Decision Tree Policies* (Resulted in a Spotlight at ICLR 2022).
- University of Oxford** Oxford, UK
MSc Statistical Science Thesis Mar. – Aug. 2021
- **Yuling Chen:** *Clustered Bayesian Inverse Reinforcement Learning Via Variational Inference*.

PEER-REVIEWED PUBLICATIONS

Synthetic Model Combination: An Instance-wise Approach to Unsupervised Ensemble Learning

A. J. Chan and M. van der Schaar. *Advances in Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS)* 2022.

Practical Approaches for Fair Learning with Multitype and Multivariate Sensitive Attributes

T. Liu, **A. J. Chan**, B. van Breugel, and M. van der Schaar. *Algorithmic Fairness through the Lens of Causality and Privacy (AFCEP) workshop at NeurIPS* 2022.

Inverse Online Learning: Understanding Non-Stationary and Reactionary Policies

A. J. Chan, A. Curth, and M. van der Schaar. *International Conference on Learning Representations (ICLR)* 2022.

POETREE: Interpretable Policy Learning with Adaptive Decision Trees

A. Pace, **A. J. Chan**, and M. van der Schaar. *International Conference on Learning Representations (ICLR)* 2022.

The Medkit-learn(ing) Environment: Medical Decision Modelling through Simulation

A. J. Chan, I. Bica, A. Hüyük, D. Jarrett, and M. van der Schaar. *Proceedings of the Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS) track on Datasets and Benchmarks* 2021.

Scalable Bayesian Inverse Reinforcement Learning

A. J. Chan and M. van der Schaar. *International Conference on Learning Representations (ICLR)* 2021.

Generative Time Series Modelling with Fourier Flows

A. M. Alaa, **A. J. Chan**, and M. van der Schaar. *International Conference on Learning Representations (ICLR)* 2021.

Unlabelled Data Improves Bayesian Uncertainty Calibration under Covariate Shift

A. J. Chan, A. M. Alaa, Z. Qian, and M. van der Schaar. *International Conference on Machine Learning (ICML)* 2020.

Optimising Human-AI Collaboration by Finding Convincing Explanations

A. J. Chan, A. Hüyük, and M. van der Schaar.

Large Language Models Lie in Detectable Ways

L. Pacchiardi*, A. J. Chan*¹, I. Moscovitz, A. Pan, Y. Gal, S. Mindermann, J. M. Brauner, and O. Evans

SERVICE

AAAI Workshop on Representation Learning for Responsible Human-Centric AI

Invited Area Chair

2023

NeurIPS SyntheticData4ML Workshop

Program Committee / Area Chair

2022

NeurIPS Workshop on Causality for Real-world Impact

Invited Reviewer

2022

ICML/ICLR/NeurIPS

Invited Reviewer ICML21-23, NeurIPS21-23, ICLR21-23

2021 – Present

Code First Girls

Volunteer course instructor for “Introduction to Python Programming”

Jan. – March 2021

University of Cambridge

Cambridge, UK

Club Captain, Wolfson College Boat Club

Aug. 2021 – Aug. 2022

- As Captain of the boat club, I was in charge of the overall running of the club, organising the training of the members as well as broader events and the alumni network.

University College London

London, UK

Vice President/Treasurer - Pure Krav Maga Society

Oct. 2018 – June 2019

- I oversaw the organisation and finances behind sessions while helping to run classes as a trainee instructor.

Welfare Officer, Effective Altruism Society

Oct. 2018 – June 2019

- I was responsible for engaging with the wider community to develop more of an understanding of the aims of Effective Altruism as well as looking out for the welfare of our members and helping develop the society further.

Electric Eels Swimming Club

Windsor, UK

Volunteer Swimming Coach

2011 – 2015

- I spent four years volunteering with the club, which aims to provide special coaching for children with Down syndrome, coaching both groups and 1-on-1 at a range of swimming ability
- I became ASA Lv1 certified in Teaching Aquatics, allowing me to develop my technical and communication skills to be a more effective coach.

¹* denotes joint first-authorship.