

Xilun Zhang

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EDUCATION

Carnegie Mellon University

Pittsburgh, PA

Master of Science in Mechanical Engineering - Research

Dec 2024

- GPA 4.00/4.00 | CMU Safe AI Lab
- Current Projects : Action Hallucination for Robot Foundation Models, Vision-based Safe Manipulations
- Courses: Models & Algorithms for Interactive Robotics; Talking to Robots; Introduction to Robot Learning; Deep Learning; Self-driving Cars: Perception and Control; Trustworthy AI Autonomy; Machine Learning

Simon Fraser University

Vancouver, Canada

Bachelor of Applied Science in Mechatronic Systems Engineering with Co-op with Distinction

Dec 2022

- Major GPA 3.85/4.33 | SFU Autonomous and Intelligent Systems Lab
- Selected Courses: Advanced Kinematics for Robotic Systems; Flight Dynamics and Control of UAVs; Modern Control System; Optimization; Sensors and Actuators; Power Electronics and Machinery
- Awards: SFU Vice-President Undergraduate Research Award (Summer 2021, Fall 2022)

WORK EXPERIENCE

Developing Generalize Open-Source Robot Foundation Models

Jun 2024 – Sep 2024

Machine Learning Engineer intern @ Esperanto Technologies

Mountain View, CA

- Developed robot task and motion planner using open-source LLM (Phi-3-mini, LLaMa3) and vision models (Grounding-DINO, OWL-ViT)
- Fine-tuned open-source LLM with GPT-augmented TAMP dataset, achieved above 90% on testing dataset for finetuned Phi-3-mini model.
- Fine-tuned end-to-end robot foundation models (OpenVLA) on manipulation tasks in both sim and real world.
- Conducted and presented literature review on open-source Small Language Models, Foundation Model for Robotics, and Visual World Models.
- Initiated robotics research in the company, and lead peer interns on open-source robot foundation model research.

RESEARCH PROJECTS

Closing Sim-to-Real Gap via Differentiable Causal Discovery

Apr 2023 – Aug 2023

Graduate Research Assistant @ CMU Safe AI Lab | PI: Prof.Ding Zhao

Pittsburgh, PA

- Proposed an algorithm that learns a differentiable mapping from the environment parameters to the differences between simulated and real-world robot trajectories, which is governed by a simultaneously-learned causal graph.
- Reproduced paper results and Outperformed state-of-the-art Sim-to-real methods in trajectory alignments such as Gradient-based Methods (ExiNet), Sampling-based Methods (NPDR) and TuneNet
- Developed PPO/SAC training simulations/tasks from scratch using Mujoco and Robosuite; Improved causal discovery network structure and parameters
- Coded the algorithm's main framework including data collection, agent training, and causal model training
- Conducted extensive literature reviews in dynamical domain randomization, domain adaptation, sampling-based optimization methods, and gradient-based optimization methods

Learning Robust Controller with Hamilton-Jacobi Readability

Aug 2022 – Dec 2022

Undergraduate Research Assistant @ SFU Multi-Agent Robotic System Lab | PI: Prof.Mo Chen

Vancouver, Canada

- Developed adversarial control framework using Hamilton-Jacobi Reachability Analysis in simulation against the quadrotor stability; Generated value function and optimal disturbance under different control settings
- Implemented baseline methods such as RARL and RAP for quadrotor simulations.
- Conducted extensive literature review on robot learning, robust reinforcement learning, guided policy search and Sim2Real transfer for quadrotor low-level control

RoboTool: Creative Tool Use with Large Language Models

Aug 2023 – Oct 2023

Graduate Research Assistant @ CMU Safe AI Lab

Pittsburgh, PA

- Built creative tool use scenarios in table-top manipulation settings using robosuite and corresponding helper functions for objects manipulations

- Wrote API functions for transferring simulation results to real Kinova Gen3 Implementation
- Implemented OWL-ViT to perception system to get 2D pose of the objects and transformed position from camera coordination to robot coordination
- Conducted literature review on geometry understanding and creative reasoning using large language model

Designing Driverless Car Using Artificial Intelligence

Jan 2022 – Aug 2022

Student Researcher @ SFU Autonomous and Intelligent Systems Lab | PI: Prof. Ahmad Rad

Vancouver, Canada

- Led a team of five to achieve optimal results by managing multiple design requirements and moderated internal/external meetings; managed project documentation including proposals, functional/design specifications
- Designed high-level controllers and tested them in CARLA Simulator, including finite state machines, trajectory rollout algorithms, trapezoidal velocity profiles, motion prediction and circle-based collision checking
- Implemented transfer learning to PilotNet with a pre-trained network to cater specific testing environment
- Implemented Stanley and Pure Pursuit Controller for vehicle lateral control and PID for longitudinal control

PUBLICATION

1. What Went Wrong? Closing the Sim-to-Real Gap via Differentiable Causal Discovery

Peide Huang, **Xilun Zhang***, Ziang Cao*, Shiqi Liu*, Mengdi Xu, Wenhao Ding, Jonathan Francis, Bingqing Chen, Ding Zhao

2023 Conference on Robot Learning (CoRL 2023)

2. Continual Vision-based Reinforcement Learning with Group Symmetries

Shiqi Liu*, Mengdi Xu*, Peide Huang, **Xilun Zhang**, Yongkang Liu, Kentaro Oguchi, Ding Zhao

2023 Conference on Robot Learning (CoRL 2023) (oral, 6.6%)

3. Creative Robot Tool Use with Large Language Models

Mengdi Xu*, Peide Huang*, Wenhao Yu*, Shiqi Liu, **Xilun Zhang**, Yaru Niu, Tingnan Zhang, Fei Xia, Jie Tan, Ding Zhao

arxiv. Under review

4. Learning Robust Policies via Interpretable Hamilton-Jacobi Reachability-Guided Disturbances

Hanyang Hu, **Xilun Zhang**, Xubo Lyu, Mo Chen

arxiv, submitted to ICRA 2025

5. Dynamics as Prompts: In-Context Learning for Sim-to-Real System Identifications

Xilun Zhang*, Shiqi Liu*, Peide Huang, William Han, Yiqi Lyu, Mengdi Xu, Ding Zhao

2025 IEEE Robotics and Automation Letters (RA-L)

TECHNICAL SKILLS

Engineering/software: Pytorch, StableBaselines3, Mujoco, Issac Sim, Issac Gym, CARLA, Sklearn, OpenCV, LTspice, LabVIEW, Proteus, SolidWorks, Soldering

Languages: Python, MATLAB, C++, Assembly