# Michael Cai

# Northwestern Economics

Placement Director: Professor Alessandro Pavan 847-491-8266 alepavan@northwestern.edu
Placement Administrator: Lola Ittner 847-491-5213 econjobmarket@northwestern.edu

CONTACT Dei

Department of Economics Northwestern University 2211 Campus Drive

2211 Campus Drive Evanston, IL 60208 Mobile: 832-758-7670

michaelcai@u.northwestern.edu

www.michaelcai.com Citizenship: USA

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Macroeconomics, Behavioral Economics

**EDUCATION** 

Ph.D in Economics, Northwestern University

2025 (expected)

Committee: Matthias Doepke (Chair), George Marios Angeletos, Matthew Rognlie B.S. *summa cum laude* in Economics, New York University Stern School of Business 2017

Job Market Paper

## Explaining the Macroeconomic Inertia Puzzle

The inertial response of aggregate variables to sudden shocks and changes in policy is a fact that many macroeconomic models struggle to explain. While several theories of bounded rationality have been proposed to justify this inertia, no consensus has emerged among them. I show canonical heterogeneous agent models — Blanchard (1985) perpetual youth and Bewley (1986) incomplete markets — can match this fact by directly using expectations data in place of model-based expectations within a semi-structural estimation framework. To analyze the determinants and policy implications of macroeconomic inertia, I then adopt a model of boundedly-rational Bayesian learning, which can explain patterns of forecast errors in expectations data that prior theories struggle to account for. Incorporating this into a heterogeneous- agent New Keynesian environment, I provide a theory for how inertia arises endogenously. Inertia occurs due to delayed amplification of an initial shock and persists due to self-reinforcing expectations that gradually unanchor. I consider two dimensions of government policy 1) responsiveness to fluctuations, e.g. the slope of the Taylor rule, and 2) speed of government debt repayment and show how systematic changes along these dimensions can reduce the degree of inertia.

SELECTED WORKS IN PROGRESS

## Optimal Long-Run Fiscal Policy with Heterogeneous Agents

(with Adrien Auclert, Matthew Rognlie, and Ludwig Straub)

We introduce a new method for characterizing the steady state of dynamic Ramsey problems, building on the dual approach to optimal taxation. Applying this method to standard calibrations of heterogeneous-agent models à la Aiyagari (1995), we find that in many cases Ramsey steady states do not exist, with our results suggesting that long-run immiseration is optimal instead. When Ramsey steady states do exist, they are associated with optimal long-run labor income taxes close to 100%. We show that these conclusions are related to strong anticipatory effects of future tax changes.

**PUBLICATIONS** 

#### Online Estimation of DSGE Models

(with Marco Del Negro, Edward Herbst, Ethan Matlin, Reca Sarfati, and Frank Schorfheide) *The Econometrics Journal*: Volume 24, Issue 1, Jan 2021, Pg. C33-C58

#### **DSGE** Forecasts of the Lost Recovery

(with Marco Del Negro, Marc P. Giannoni, Abhi Gupta, Pearl Li, and Erica Moszkowski) *International Journal of Forecasting*: Volume 35, Issue 4, Oct-Dec 2019, Pg. 1770-1789

Awards	Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Pre-Doctoral Fellowship in Behavioral Macroeconomics Graduate Fellowship (Northwestern University) Award for Excellence in Economics (Single awardee from NYU Stern)	2023-2025 2019-23 2017
RESEARCH EXPERIENCE	Research Assistant, Prof. Matthias Doepke, Northwestern University Research Assistant, Prof. Matthew Rognlie, Northwestern University Senior Research Analyst, Dr. Marco Del Negro, Federal Reserve Bank of New York Research Assistant, Prof. Tim Christensen, New York University	2022-23 2021-22 2017-19 2016-17
TEACHING EXPERIENCE	Intermediate Macroeconomics, Prof. Mark Witte, Northwestern University Intermediate Macroeconomics, Prof. Giorgio Primiceri, Northwestern University	2023 2021
OTHER EXPERIENCE	Visiting Scholar, Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago Research Officer, International Monetary Fund	2024 2022

PROGRAMMING Python, Julia, Matlab

LANGUAGES English (native), Chinese (basic)

**REFERENCES** Professor Matthias Doepke

Department of Economics London School of Economics

Houghton Street

London, England WC2A 2AE

m.doepke@lse.ac.uk

Professor Matthew Rognlie Department of Economics Northwestern University 2211 Campus Drive Evanston, IL 60208

matthew.rognlie@northwestern.edu

Professor George Marios Angeletos

Department of Economics Northwestern University 2211 Campus Drive Evanston, IL 60208

angeletos@northwestern.edu

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