

# Shaozhe Cheng

*Curriculum Vitae*

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Department of Psychology & Neuroscience  
Duke University; Durham, NC; 27708; USA

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## Positions

Postdoc Scholar, Duke University & UCLA 2024-  
Collaborators: [Tamar Kushnir](#) & [Michael Tomasello](#) (Duke)  
[Tao Gao](#) (UCLA)

## Education

Ph.D., Cognitive Psychology, Zhejiang University 2023  
Advisors: Jifan Zhou (ZJU), Mowei Shen (ZJU), Tao Gao (UCLA)  
Dissertation: *On the nature and origins of the unique human mind: Intentional commitment under conflicting desires (Best Doctoral Dissertation Award)*

B.S., Psychology, Shanghai Normal University 2016

## Awards and Honors

- Early-Career Scholar, Intentions & AI Workshop (<https://ai-intentions.org>) 2025
- Excellent Doctoral Dissertation Award 2023
- Grant for Excellence in Doctoral Research 2022
- Cognitive Science Society Conference Award 2021
- National Scholarship for Postgraduates 2017

## Research Interests

What makes the human mind and intelligence unique? I draw on theories and methods from philosophy, evolution, psychology (cognitive, social, developmental), and artificial intelligence to explore the nature and origins of human intentional action and agency. By combining behavioral and computational approaches, I aim to bridge human and artificial intelligence by uncovering the social-cognitive foundations of uniquely human agentic structures and behaviors.

## Publications

### *In preparation*

**Cheng, S.,** Gao T., Tomasello, M., & Kushnir, T. *What is it like to be agentic? Testing collaborative behaviors in humans, AIs, and their interactions using a minimal coordination game.*

### *Journal Articles*

**Cheng, S.,** Zhu, J., Zhou J., Shen, M., & Gao T. (2025). Spontaneous coordination with self-commitment: How the presence of others alters the strength, goal and timing of commitment. *Cognition*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2025.106287>

**Cheng, S., Zhao, M., Tang, N., Zhao, Y., Zhou J., Shen, M., & Gao T. (2023).** Intention beyond desire: Spontaneous intentional commitment regulates conflicting desires. *Cognition*, 238, 105513. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2023.105513>

Zhai, S<sup>#</sup>, **Cheng, S<sup>#</sup>**, Moskowitz, N., Shen, M., & Gao, T. (2024). The development of commitment: Attention for intention. *Child Development*, 95(1), 7-15.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13955>

# Shared first authors

**Cheng, S., Shi, B., Zhao, Y., Tang, N., Xu., H., Gao, T., Zhou J., & Shen, M. (2017)** Rethinking attention: A reinforcement learning model of attention. *Chinese Journal of Applied Psychology*.

### *Peer-Reviewed Conference Proceedings*

**Cheng, S., Zhu, J., Zhou J., Shen, M., & Gao T. (2024).** Intentional commitment as a spontaneous presentation of self. In *Proceedings of the 46th Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society*.

**Cheng, S., Zhao, M., Zhu, J., Zhou J., Shen, M., & Gao T. (2022).** Intentional commitment through an internalized theory of mind: Acting in the eyes of an imagined observer. In *Proceedings of the 44th Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society*.

**Cheng, S., Zhao, M., Zhu, J., Zhou J., Shen, M., & Gao T. (2022).** Intentional commitment as goal perseverance in human planning [Workshop on Social Intelligence in Humans and Robots]. *The annual meeting of the Robotics: Science and Systems 2022 (RSS 2022)*. *Virtual: Workshop RSS 2022*. <https://social-intelligence-human-ai.github.io/>

Zhai, S., **Cheng, S.**, Moskowitz, N., Shen, M., & Gao, T. (2022). The development of commitment: Attention for intention. In *Proceedings of the 44th Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society*.

**Cheng, S., Tang, N., An, W., Zhao, Y., Zhou J., Shen, M., & Gao T. (2021).** Intention beyond desire: Humans Spontaneously Commit to Future Actions. In *Proceedings of the 43rd Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society*.

### *In Preparation*

**Cheng, S., Zhu, J., Zhou J., Shen, M., & Gao T. (in prep).** From attention capture to social coordination: “Abrupt onset” rallies joint planning.

**Cheng, S., Zhao, M., Zhu, J., Zhou J., Shen, M., & Gao T. (in prep).** Modeling intentions through an internalized theory of mind: Acting in the eyes of an imagined observer.

**Cheng, S., Zhu, J., Zhou J., Shen, M., & Gao T. (in prep).** Viewing others as committed agents.

## Conference Presentations

^Students I supervised

**Cheng, S.,** Main, K<sup>^</sup>, Kushnir, T., & Gao, T. (2025, May). Spontaneous social coordination through visually grounded theory-of-mind in children's and adults' decision-making. Poster accepted at *the Annual Meeting of the Vision Sciences Society*, St. Pete Beach, Florida, USA.

**Cheng, S.,** Main, K<sup>^</sup>, Gao, T., & Kushnir, T. (2025, May). Children's Spontaneous Commitment and Intention Coordination in Individual and Social Decision-Making Contexts. Talk at the Symposium: Unravelling early and middle childhood decision-making: From individual characteristics to social influences, *Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting (SRCD 2025)*, Minneapolis, MN, USA.

**Cheng, S.,** Zhu, J<sup>^</sup>, Zhou J., Shen, M., & Gao T. (2024). From attention capture to social coordination: "Abrupt onset" rallies joint planning. Poster presented at *the 2024 VSS Annual Meeting*. *Vision Sciences Society*.

Zhu, J<sup>^</sup>, **Cheng, S.,** Gao T., Shen, M., & Zhou J. (2023). Viewing others as committed agents. Poster presented at *the 2023 SPSP Annual Convention*. *Society for Personality and Social Psychology*.

Zhu, J<sup>^</sup>, **Cheng, S.,** Gao T., Shen, M., & Zhou J. (2023). Intention as hierarchical constraints in human planning. Poster presented at *the 2023 VSS Annual Meeting*. *Vision Sciences Society*.

Zhu, J<sup>^</sup>, **Cheng, S.,** Gao T., Shui, R., Shen, M., & Zhou J. (2023). People expect others to plan with consistency to intention. Poster presented at *the 2023 APS Annual Convention*. *Association for Psychological Science*.

**Cheng, S.,** Zhao, M., Zhu, J<sup>^</sup>, Zhou J., Shen, M., & Gao T. (2022). Intentional commitment as goal perseverance in human planning. Oral presentation at the Workshop on Social Intelligence in Humans and Robots in the *annual meeting of the Robotics: Science and Systems 2022 (RSS 2022)*. <https://social-intelligence-human-ai.github.io/>

Zhai, S., **Cheng, S.,** Moskowitz, N., Shen, M., & Gao, T. (2022). The development of commitment: Attention for intention. Oral presentation at *the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society*.

**Cheng, S.,** Tang, N., An, W., Zhao, Y., Zhou J., Shen, M., & Gao T. (2021). Intention beyond desire: Commitment in human action. Poster presented at *the 47th annual meeting of the Society for Philosophy and Psychology*, 6/28/21 – 7/2/21, *Virtual-SPP*.

**Cheng, S.,** Tang, N., An, W., Zhao, Y., Zhou J., Shen, M., & Gao T. (2020). Intention beyond desire: Commitment in human action. Poster presented at *the annual meeting of the Vision Sciences Society*, 6/19/20 – 6/24/20, *Virtual-VSS*.

**Cheng, S.,** Xu, H., Tang, N., Zhou J., Chen, H., Liang, J., Gao T., & Shen, M. (2018). Hierarchical Constrains on the Distribution of Attention in Dynamic Displays. Poster presented at *the 30th APS Annual Convention*.

## Teaching

- **Advanced Psychological Research Methods (graduate course), 2019, 2020**  
Guest Lecturer, *Computational modeling in psychological research*
- **Psychology and Artificial Intelligence (undergraduate course), 2018, 2019**  
Teaching Assistant
- **Seminar on Evolutionary Psychology (undergraduate seminar), 2017, 2018**  
Guest Lecturer

## Ad Hoc Reviewer

*Science Robotics*

*Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*

*Cognition*

*The Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society*

## References

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Departments of Communication, Statistics and Psychology

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