

Aonan Zhang

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Experience

Apple — Foundation Model (AFM) Team

Seattle, WA

STAFF MACHINE LEARNING RESEARCH SCIENTIST

Feb. 2023 – Present

- **Core contributor to the development of Apple Intelligence’s foundation language models (2023 – Present).**
- **Developed AFM’s text pretraining corpus on math, including large-scale real & synthetic data.**
 - Partner with crawling and extraction teams to expand coverage reach and improve extraction precision.
 - Elevate data quality by implementing robust filtering, categorization, and curation of high-value math content.
 - Design and curate synthetic training data from diverse sources including QA, forums, and research publications.
- **Research on foundation models, synthetic data generation, etc.**
 - *Synthetic Bootstrapped Pretraining: an end-to-end data synthesis pipeline that generates trillions of synthetic data points with minimal human intervention, achieving data self-bootstrapping in pretraining.*
- **Improved AFM’s model efficiency.**
 - Designed, developed, and launched recurrent draft models as a speculative decoding solution into Apple’s serving pipeline.
 - Investigated performance trade-offs in scaling sparse attention layers versus FFN in MoE.

ByteDance Inc.

Bellevue, WA

SENIOR RESEARCH SCIENTIST

Oct. 2019 – Feb. 2023

- Designed, implemented, and deployed cutting-edge data subsampling methods with theoretical guarantees.
- Delivered 10+ launches in ByteDance’s Ads. & Rec. system that reduced ~20M USD resource compensation per year in total.
- Published papers on data subsampling, uncertainty estimation, graph generation, and federated learning.

Education

Columbia University in the City of New York

New York, NY

PH.D. IN ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING

Aug. 2014 – Oct. 2019

- Thesis: Composing deep learning and Bayesian nonparametric methods.
- Committee: Shih-Fu Chang, David Blei, John Cunningham, John Paisley.

Tsinghua University

Beijing, China

B.ENG., M.ENG. IN COMPUTER SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Aug. 2008 – Jul. 2012, Aug. 2012 – Jul. 2014

- Thesis: Max-margin infinite hidden Markov models. (Advisor: Jun Zhu)

Selected Publications

- [1] Zitong Yang*, **Aonan Zhang***, Hong Liu, Tatsunori Hashimoto, Emmanuel Candès, Chong Wang, and Ruoming Pang. Synthetic bootstrapped pretraining. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2509.15248*, 2025.
- [2] Hanzhi Zhou, Erik Hornberger, Pengsheng Guo, Xiyu Zhou, Saiwen Wang, Xin Wang, Yifei He, Xuankai Chang, Rene Rauch, Louis D’hauwe, et al. Apple intelligence foundation language models: Tech report 2025. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2507.13575*, 2025.
- [3] Tom Gunter, Zirui Wang, Chong Wang, Ruoming Pang, Andy Narayanan, **Aonan Zhang**, Bowen Zhang, Chen Chen, Chung-Cheng Chiu, David Qiu, et al. Apple intelligence foundation language models. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2407.21075*, 2024.
- [4] Yunfei Cheng*, **Aonan Zhang***, Xuanyu Zhang, Chong Wang, and Yi Wang. Recurrent drafter for fast speculative decoding in large language models. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2403.09919*, 2024.