

Jianlin "Herman" Li

jianlin.li@uwaterloo.ca | jianlin-herman-li.github.io

Ph.D. in Computer Science

Google Scholar | linkedin.com/in/jianlin-herman-li

specialized in **programming languages & compilers**

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

Objective

I care about software safety and efficiency across the entire life cycle: from **design (model checking)**, to **program (program analysis, and formal verification via automatic and interactive theorem proving)**, to **compilation (type checking, optimization, and compiler correctness)**.

Education (Anticipated graduation date: 08/26)

University of Waterloo, Ph.D. in Computer Science

Sep 2021 – **Expected August 2026**

Supervisors: Yizhou Zhang, Ondřej Lhoták

Cumulative GPA: 96.2/100

Institute of Software, Chinese Academy of Sciences, M.Sc. in Computer Science

Sep 2018 – Aug 2021

Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, B.Sc. in Computer Science

Sep 2013 – Jun 2018

Experience

Research Assistant(Probabilistic Programming / Compiler Projects), University of Waterloo Sep 2021 – Present

- I design **probabilistic programming languages (PPLs)** and implement **compilers** with novel compilation strategies tailored to different inference methods (e.g., variational Bayesian inference, variable elimination) and **compilation artifacts**, enabling efficient, reliable, and certified probabilistic programming:
 - **GENI (PLDI 2025)**: A compiler implemented in **Rust** that compiles functional programming-style probabilistic programs into generating functions, a compact and exact compilation target representing measures. Gave the first **design** and **formalization** of GF compilation for a functional PPL; implemented a **live-variable analysis** optimization; and demonstrated scalability competitive with **BDD**-based inference.
 - **MAPPL(PLDI 2024)**: A compiler implemented in **OCaml** that enables scalable inference by factorizing recursive probabilistic programs via **continuation-passing style (CPS)** compilation and **information-flow typing** (with a denotational, **logical-relations** model). Compilation artifacts recover expert-designed **polynomial-time** algorithms (e.g., forward algorithm for **HMM**) without human intervention, whereas baselines require **exponential time**.
 - **FIDELIO(POPL 2023)**: A compiler embodies symbolic methods, e.g., a **type system** and **program analysis**, that aid neural-network-based inference. Consistently improved training/inference over mean-field and **LSTM** guide baselines across benchmarks. (**Pyro PPL**, **PyTorch**, **LSTM**, **Deep Amortized Inference**)
- Implement maximum entropy **reinforcement learning** via variational inference in **Pyro**, a universal probabilistic programming language (PPL) written in Python and supported by **PyTorch** on the backend.

Teaching Assistant(taught tutorials, held office hours, etc.), University of Waterloo

Sep 2021 – Aug 2025

- Computer Architecture, Compiler Construction, Logic and Computation, Foundations of Sequential Programs.

Research Assistant & Exchange Student, Saarland University (Saarbrücken, Germany)

Sep 2019 – Aug 2020

- Worked on automated safety **verification** of programs invoking **neural networks** (published at **CAV 2021**):
 - Trained a heterogeneous controller combining neural networks and handcrafted components (C programs) via **reinforcement learning** in an **OpenAI** Minigrid-style environment, enabling autonomous decision-making.
 - Integrated **CLAM**, a state-of-the-art **LLVM** bitcode static analyzer, with **DEEPSYMBOL**(my neural network verifier), enabling a precise neuro-aware verification pipeline (impossible to verify without our approach).
- Generalized Minsky machine halting problem \preceq_m 2 counter machine halting problem in **Coq**.

Research Assistant(Formal Verification), Institute of Software, Chinese Academy of Sciences

Sep 2018 – Aug 2021

- Developed **DEEPSYMBOL**, a **verification** tool for the robustness of **deep neural networks (DNNs)**.
 - Propose a novel **symbolic propagation** method improving **abstract interpretation** for **DNN analysis**.
 - Resolved issues in open-source projects, e.g., fixed a severe memory leak in **Zonotope** of **APRON** abstract domain library that prevented scaling, caused by an ABI mismatch leading to memory layout and calling convention errors.
 - Bring benefits of up to **549%** speedup (9.16h \rightarrow 1.41h) to a state-of-the-art **SMT**-based **verifier**.

Technologies

Languages/Frameworks: Rust, OCaml, C++, LLVM, Python, Java, PyTorch, JAX, Coq, Lean 4, Agda.

Skills: Compiler Construction, Formal Methods, Formal Verification, Theorem Proving, Program Analysis.

Publications (Probabilistic Programming Languages · Semantics · Compilers · Type Systems)

- [1] **Jianlin Li** and Yizhou Zhang.
Compiling with Generating Functions.
Proc. ACM Program. Lang., 9(**ICFP 2025**, Singapore).
- [2] **Jianlin Li**, Eric Wang, and Yizhou Zhang.
Compiling Probabilistic Programs for Variable Elimination with InformationFlow.
Proc. ACM Program. Lang., 8(**PLDI 2024**, Copenhagen, Denmark).
- [3] **Jianlin Li**, Leni Ven, Pengyuan Shi, and Yizhou Zhang.
Type-Preserving, Dependence-Aware Guide Generation for Sound, Effective Amortized Probabilistic Inference.
Proc. ACM Program. Lang., 7(**POPL 2023**, Boston, United States).

Publications (Formal Verification · AI Safety · Adversarial Machine Learning · Model Checking)

- [4] Maria Christakis, Hasan Ferit Eniser, Holger Hermanns, Jörg Hoffmann, Yugesh Kothari, **Jianlin Li**, Jorge A. Navas, and Valentin Wüstholtz.
Automated safety verification of programs invoking neural networks.
Computer Aided Verification - 33rd International Conference, CAV 2021.
- [5] Pengfei Yang, Renjue Li, **Jianlin Li**, Cheng-Chao Huang, Jingyi Wang, Jun Sun, Bai Xue, and Lijun Zhang. Improving neural network verification through spurious region guided refinement.
Tools and Algorithms for the Construction and Analysis of Systems - 27th International Conference, TACAS 2021, as Part of ETAPS 2021, Luxembourg.
- [6] Renjue Li, **Jianlin Li**, Cheng-Chao Huang, Pengfei Yang, Xiaowei Huang, Lijun Zhang, Bai Xue, and Holger Hermanns.
PRODeep: A Platform for Robustness Verification of Deep Neural Networks.
ESEC/FSE 2020 : 28th ACM Joint European Software Engineering Conference and Symposium on the Foundations of Software Engineering, USA.
- [7] **Jianlin Li**, Jiangchao Liu, Pengfei Yang, Liqian Chen, Xiaowei Huang, and Lijun Zhang. Analyzing Deep Neural Networks with Symbolic Propagation: Towards Higher Precision and Faster Verification.
SAS 2019: 26th Static Analysis Symposium, Porto, Portugal.
- [8] Hongfei Fu, Yi Li, and **Jianlin Li**.
Verifying Probabilistic Timed Automata Against Omega-Regular Dense-Time Properties.
QEST 2018: 15th International Conference on Quantitative Evaluation of SysTems, China.

Awards

- Competitive programming:
 - 2015: Silver Medal, **ACM-ICPC** Shanghai Metropolitan Programming Contest
 - 2014: Silver Medal, **ACM-ICPC** Asia Regional Contest, Anshan Site
- Scholarships:
 - 2023: David R. Cheriton Graduate Scholarship
 - 2021: University of Waterloo Entrance Scholarship
 - 2020: China National Scholarship (**Top 0.2%**)
 - 2020/2019: Institute of Software, CAS First-Class Academic Scholarships (**Top 10%**)
 - 2014: China National Scholarship (**Top 0.2%**)

Services

- **Sub-Reviewer:** LICS 2018, TASE 2019, FM 2019, FMAC 2019, TACAS 2021, PLDI 2024, OOPSLA 2024.
- **Student Volunteer:** CONCUR 2018, SSFM 2018, SSFM 2019, LICS 2020.