

(Mary) [Shaocong MA](#)

PhD in Social Science

Division of Social Science

Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST)

Email: mary.ma@connect.ust.hk

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Child development: Social development, cognitive development, emotional development

Family studies: Parenting, non-parental childcare, screen time and family dynamics

Education: Digital learning, STEM learning, motivation

ACADEMIC POSITIONS

Research Assistant Professor, Division of Social Science, HKUST, 2024-Present

Post-Doctorate Research Associate, Department of Psychology, University of Virginia, 2023-2024

Advisor: [Amrisha Vaish](#)

EDUCATION/ACADEMIC TRAINING

Visiting Scholar, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University, 2022-2023

Research Interests: Development of social learning and emotions

Advisor: [Paul L. Harris](#)

PhD, Division of Social Science, HKUST, 2020-2023

Thesis: *From Whom Should I Learn? Examining the Development of Selective Learning Impacted by Informants' Perceived Competence and Warmth*

Advisors: [Michelle Yik](#) & [Eva E. Chen](#)

HKUST RedBird Academic Excellence Award

MPhil, Division of Social Science, HKUST, 2018-2020

Thesis: *Preferring Naturals or Strivers: People's Perceptions and Behaviors Towards Others with Different Sources of Achievement*

Advisor: [Eva E. Chen](#)

MEd, Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong, 2017-2018

Specialty: Early Childhood Education

Thesis: *Foreign Domestic Helpers' Involvement in Non-Parental Childcare: A Multiple Case Study in Hong Kong*

Advisor: [Hui Li](#)

BS, School of Psychology, Nanjing Normal University, 2013-2017

Thesis: *Father Involvement and Children's Resilience: The Role of Implicit Identity of Masculine Characteristics*

First Prize in Bachelor Thesis Competition among around 272,000 competitors

Awarded University Excellent Graduate

RESEARCH

JOURNAL PUBLICATIONS

1. Chen, E. E., **Ma, S.**, Bala, M., Groves, J. M., & Gaither, S. E. (2025). Whom do I like more? Examining ethnic majority and minority children's socializing preferences in Hong Kong. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*. doi: 10.1016/j.jecp.2025.106330. JCR-Q2, 5-year IF: 2.3.
2. **Ma, S.**, & Harris, P. L. (2025). "Has the climate changed?" How testimony shapes beliefs in emerging scientific phenomena. *Journal of Cognition and Development*. 1-17. doi: 10.1080/15248372.2025.2506066. JCR-Q2, 5-year IF: 2.5.
[Special Issue: Child Development and Climate Change]
3. **Ma, S.**, Cui, Y. K., Suárez, S., Chen, E. E., & Corriveau, K. H. (2025). Are dominant figures more trustworthy? Examining the relation between parental authoritarianism and children's trust preferences in the U.S. and China (Registered Report Stage 2). *Infant and Child Development*. 34(3), e70023. doi: 10.1002/icd.70023. JCR-Q2, 4-year IF: 2.1.
4. **Ma, S.**, Payir, A., McLoughlin, N., & Harris, P. L. (2024). How testimony impacts beliefs in science and religion. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*. 28(9), 792-803. doi: 10.1016/j.tics.2024.04.014. JCR-Q1, 5-year Impact Factor (IF): 21.8.
5. **Ma, S.**, Cui, Y. K., Wan, S., Chen, E. E., & Corriveau, K. H. (2024). Children consider informants' explanation quality together with their social dominance in seeking novel explanations. *Child Development*. 95(6), 2119-2132. doi: 10.1111/cdev.14148. JCR-Q1, 4-year IF: 6.3.
6. Shu, Y., Li, H., **Ma, S.**, Bian, L. (2024). The impact of sufferers' wealth status on pain perceptions: Its development and relation to allocation of healthcare resources. *Developmental Science*, 27(3), e13467. doi: 10.1111/desc.13467. JCR-Q1, 4-year IF: 5.6.
7. **Ma, S.**, Li, J., & Chen, E. E. (2024). Does screen media hurt young children's social development? Longitudinal associations between parental engagement, children's screen time, and their social competence. *Early Education and Development*. 35(1), 10-25. doi: 10.1080/10409289.2022.2151401. JCR-Q1, 4-year IF: 3.9.
8. **Ma, S.**, Tsay, C., & Chen, E. E. (2024). Talented naturals are perceived as more competent and trustworthy than hard workers. *Current Psychology*. 43(7), 6494-6505. doi: 10.1007/s12144-023-04763-2. JCR-Q2, 4-year IF: 2.9.
9. **Ma, S.**, Tsay, C., & Chen, E. E. (2023). Preference for talented naturals over hard workers emerges in childhood and consequently shapes behavior. *Child Development*, 94(3), 674-690. doi: 10.1111/cdev.13886. JCR-Q1, 4-year IF: 6.3.
10. **Ma, S.**, Cui, Y. K., Suárez, S., Chen, E. E., & Corriveau, K. H. (2023). Are dominant figures more trustworthy? Examining the relation between parental authoritarianism and children's trust preferences in the U.S. and China (Registered Report Stage 1). *Infant and Child Development*, e2476. doi: 10.1002/icd.2476. JCR-Q2, 4-year IF: 2.1.
11. Chen, E. E., **Ma, S.**, Bala, M., Groves, J. M., & Gaither, S. E. (2023). Do we perceive ethnic ingroup members as wealthier? Examining Hong Kong children's inferences of wealth status based on resources and ethnic group membership. *Cognitive Development*. 66, doi: 10.1016/j.cogdev.2023.101334.

12. **Ma, S.,** Chen, E. E., & Li, H. (2020). Foreign domestic helpers' involvement in non-parental childcare: A multiple case study in Hong Kong. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 34(3), 427-446. doi:10.1080/02568543.2019.1701588.

BOOK CHAPTER

1. **Ma, S.,** & Shields, S. (forthcoming). Gendering emotion across cultures and throughout history. In M. Yik (Ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Emotion and Culture*. Oxford University Press.

SYMPOSIA CO-CHAired

1. *How do we understand failure and success? Cross-cultural examinations of children's evaluations of others' performances*. Co-chair with E. E. Chen at the Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting (2025, May 1-3), Minneapolis, MN, United States.
2. *Navigating social growth: What factors impact young children's social development?* Co-chair with E. E. Chen at the 2024 International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development (2024, June 16-20), Lisbon, Portugal.
3. *Observing, conforming, and internalizing: How does social learning occur across different contexts and cultures?* Co-chair with E. E. Chen at the Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting (2023, March 23-25), Salt Lake City, UT, United States.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

1. **Ma, S.** (2025, June 14). When it's safe to explore: Longitudinal associations between secure attachment, emotional competence, and cognitive development in early childhood [symposium]. In **C. Cheng** (chair), *The elements in play: Examining how early developmental factors influence play through parental engagement, attachment, and planning*. Conference for Research in Early Childhood Education and Development, Hong Kong SAR, China.
2. **Ma, S.,** Hu, Y., Zhao, X., & Chen, E. E. (2025, May 1-3). Development of preferences for individuals with consistent success over those who overcome failures to succeed. In **S. Ma** & E. E. Chen (Co-Chairs), *How do we understand failure and success? Cross-cultural examinations of children's evaluations of others' performances* [Symposium]. The Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, Minneapolis, MN, United States.
3. **Ma, S.,** Yik, M., & Chen, E. E. (2025, May 1-3). Can lying be good? Examining the impact of cultural expectation on children's honesty judgments. In I. Bisla (Chair), *Understanding children's epistemic vigilance: An examination of individual differences* [Symposium]. The Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, Minneapolis, MN, United States.
4. **Ma, S.,** & Chen, E. E. (2025, May 1-3). Digital parenting and children's self-control: Longitudinal associations between young children's screen time and executive function. In E. Lau (Chair), *Parenting in the digital age: Technology's influence on parent-child dynamics and child development* [Symposium]. The Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, Minneapolis, MN, United States.

5. Dong, X., Jeong, M., & **Ma, S.** (2024, August 9-13). Reversing the curse of failure: Learning cues increase willingness to seek (and share) failure experiences [Paper presentation]. Academy of Management (AOM) Annual Meeting, In *Developing Development: Beliefs and Behaviors Driving the Provision of Feedback, Advice, & Coaching* [Symposium]. Chicago, IL. United States.
6. Dong, X., Jeong, M., & **Ma, S.** (2024, June 23-26). Reverse the curse of failure: Learning cues increase willingness to seek (and share) failure experiences [Paper presentation]. International Association for Conflict Management (IACM), Singapore.
7. **Ma, S.**, Chen, E. E., & Yik, M. (2024, June 16-20). Chinese children and adults' evaluations of peers engaging in achievement-related lying. In **S. Ma** & E. E. Chen (Co-Chairs), *Navigating social growth: What factors impact young children's social development?* [symposium]. 2024 International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development, Lisbon, Portugal.
8. Chen, E. E., Kao, C.-H., Lin, C.-C., Hsu, H.-C., & **Ma, S.** (2024, June 16-20). What is Buddha like? Examining young Taiwanese children's considerations of human and supernatural agents. In A. Payir (chair), *Children's perspectives on religion: Cognitive and behavioural dimensions* [symposium]. 2024 International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development, Lisbon, Portugal.
9. **Ma, S.**, & Chen, E. E. (2024, June 1-3). Does parents' social group matter? Longitudinal associations between majority and minority mothers' engagement and children's socioemotional development [symposium]. In **S. Ma** (chair), *Social justice and equity*. International Conference for Research in Early Childhood Education and Development (InCRECE), Hong Kong SAR, China.
10. **Ma, S.**, Harris, P. L. & Chen, E. E. (2024, March 21-23). *Trusting competent or sociable informants? Examining the impact of evaluation modes on children's trust decision-making processes* [Poster presentation]. 2024 Cognitive Development Society Biennial Conference, Pasadena, CA, United States.
11. Clayton, S., **Ma, S.**, Shu, Y. & Vaish, A. (2024, March 21-23). *Boundaries of early forgiveness: the impact of apology type and transgression frequency on children's forgiveness decisions* [Poster presentation]. 2024 Cognitive Development Society Biennial Conference, Pasadena, CA, United States.
12. Jeong, M., Dong, X., & **Ma, S.** (2023, November 17-20). Preference for the natural advice-giver: Failure is overlooked unless people think about who learned [Paper presentation]. Society for Judgment and Decision Making Annual Conference, San Francisco, CA, United States.
13. Chen, E. E., **Ma, S.**, Bala, M., Groves, J. M., & Gaither, S. E. (2023, October 14). Perceptions of wealth status among young children in Hong Kong [Paper presentation]. International Conference on Child Development and Family Studies, Taipei, Taiwan, Republic of China.
14. **Ma, S.**, & Chen, E. E. (2023, March 23-25). Social learning of conformity: Children and adults' evaluations of conformists versus non-conformists across different contexts. In **S. Ma** & E. E. Chen (Co-Chairs), *Observing, conforming, and internalizing: How does social learning occur across different contexts and cultures?* [Symposium]. The Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, Salt Lake City, UT, United States.
15. **Ma, S.**, & Chen, E. E. (2023, March 23-25). Longitudinal associations between non-indigenous, indigenous, and immigrant mothers' engagement and children's

- socioemotional development in Taiwan. In E. E. Chen (Chair), *Examining familial and early developmental processes among ethnic majority and minority families in Asia* [Symposium]. The Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, Salt Lake City, UT, United States.
16. Chen, E. E., **Ma, S.**, Bala, M., Groves, J. M., & Gaither, S. E. (2023, March 23-25). Is my group better? Investigating Hong Kong ethnic majority and minority children's socializing preferences. In E. E. Chen (Chair), *Examining familial and early developmental processes among ethnic majority and minority families in Asia* [Symposium]. The Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, Salt Lake City, UT, United States.
 17. **Ma, S.**, Cui, Y. K., Chen, E. E. & Corriveau, K. H. (2023, March 23-25). *Children weigh informants' explanation quality over their power in explaining present, but not future, questions* [Poster presentation]. The Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, Salt Lake City, UT, United States.
 18. **Ma, S.**, Li, J., & Chen, E. E. (2022, July 13-15). How does screen time impact Taiwanese Chinese children's development? Longitudinal associations between parental engagement, children's screen time, and social competence. In J. Chang (Chair), *Self and Relationships: Perspectives on Cultural and Social Change* [Symposium]. The 12th Conference for Chinese Psychologists, Taipei, Taiwan.
 19. **Ma, S.** (2021, November 27). *Succeeding from talent or effort? Source of achievement impacts competence-related judgments and consequently shapes trust decision-making* [Paper presentation]. The Inaugural Hong Kong Judgment and Decision-Making Day, Hong Kong SAR, China.
 20. **Ma, S.**, & Chen, E. E. (2021, April 7-9). Talent versus hard work: Examining the parental influence on children's preferences for talent over effort. In E. E. Chen (Chair), *Examining the relationship between parenting and young Chinese children's emotional, sociocognitive, and academic development* [Symposium]. The Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, Minneapolis, MN, United States.
 21. **Ma, S.**, & Chen, E. E. (2021, April 7-9). *Does source of achievement matter? Examining the naturalness bias in Chinese children and adults* [Poster presentation]. The Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, Minneapolis, MN, United States.
 22. **Ma, S.**, Cui, Y. K., Munoz, M., Qiu, F. W., Suárez, S., Chen, E. E. & Corriveau, K. H. (2021, April 7-9). **Examining the relationship between parental authoritarianism and children's trusting preferences in China and the U.S.* [Poster presentation]. The Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, Minneapolis, MN, United States.
 *This presentation was selected as the 2021 SRCD Strategic Plan Poster Winner exemplifying international research related to child development.
 23. **Ma, S.**, & Chen, E. E. (2020, May 2-4). *The natural or the striver? Examining gender differences and parental impact on the naturalness bias* [Poster presentation]. Construction of the 'Other': Development, Consequences, and Applied Implications of Prejudice and Discrimination in Rio Grande, Puerto Rico, United States. (Conference canceled as impacted by COVID-19)
 24. **Ma, S.**, Chen, E. E., & Li, H. (2019, March 21-23). *Foreign domestic helpers' involvement in non-parental childcare: A multiple case study in Hong Kong* [Poster presentation]. The Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, Baltimore, MD, United States.

25. **Ma, S.,** Wang, Y., & Li, X. (2019, March 21–23). *Father involvement and children's resilience: The impact of implicit identity on masculine characteristics of different genders*. [Poster presentation]. The Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, Baltimore, MD, United States.
26. **Ma, S.,** & Hua, S. (2017, May 18–20). *Investigating exceeding early childhood education in China* [Paper Presentation]. The World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP) Asia Pacific Regional Conference, Hong Kong SAR, China.
27. Hua, S., & **Ma, S.** (2017, May 18–20). *Investigation of parental companion for preschoolers in China: Taking Parents in Nanjing as an Example* [Paper Presentation]. The World Organization for Early Childhood Education (OMEP) Asia Pacific Regional Conference, Hong Kong SAR, China.

GRANTS

1. Research Grants Council General Research Fund Grant (GRF). Unveiling the dynamics of conformity: Examining young children's preferences for conformists and nonconformists across different contexts (GRF 16603525). Principal Investigator. 2025-2027. 482,360 HKD.
2. Division Development Fund. HKUST. 2024-2025. 15,000 HKD.
3. Duty Visit Fund. HKUST. 2024-2025. 15,000 HKD.
4. Early Career Research Grant in Developmental Psychology. American Psychological Association (APA). Sole Grant Awardee. 2024. 1,000 USD.
5. University Grants Council Research Travel Grant (RTG). SCRD 2023 Biennial Meeting (RTG22/23.HSS005). Grant Awardee. 2023. 4,902 HKD.
6. Research Grants Council General Research Fund Grant (GRF). The naturally talented or the hard worker? Examining the emergence and development of the naturalness bias over time (GRF 16601921). Student Investigator; Principal Investigators: Eva E. Chen & Michelle Yik. 2021-2023. 325,701 HKD.
7. University Grants Council Research Travel Grant (RTG). SCRD 2021 Biennial Meeting (RTG20/21.HSS003). Grant Awardee. 2021. 662 HKD.
8. University Grants Council Research Travel Grant (RTG). SCRD 2019 Biennial Meeting (RTG18/19.HSS010). Grant Awardee. 2019. 10,500 HKD.
9. Nanjing Normal University Research Travel Grant. OMEP 2017 Asia Pacific Regional Conference. Grant Awardee. 2017. 3,800 RMB.

HONORS

SCHOLARSHIPS

1. Overseas Research Awards for PhD Students, 60,000 HKD (2022-2023)
2. Dr Charles Chan Postgraduate Scholarship, 54,090 HKD (2021-2022)
3. Postgraduate Studentship, approximately 1,080,000 (HKUST, 2018-2023)
4. Rolling Scholarship for Excellent Students, approximately 1,500 CNY (Nanjing Normal University, 2014-2017)

AWARDS

1. Early Career Travel Award (500 USD Award), The Society for Research in Child Development Biennial Meeting, 2025
2. APA Division 7 Early Career Research Grant Winner (1,000 USD Award), APA, 2024
3. Early Career Scholar Travel Award (1,789 Euro Award), International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development (ISSBD) Biennial Meeting, 2024
4. HKUST RedBird Academic Excellence Award (20,000 HKD Award), HKUST, 2023
5. SRCD Graduate Student Travel Award (300 USD Award), The Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) Biennial Meeting, 2023
6. Overseas Research Awards (60,000 HKD Award), HKUST, 2022-2023
7. Dr Charles Chan Postgraduate Scholarship Award (54,090 HKD Award), HKUST, 2021-2022
8. Strategic Plan Poster Winner, SRCD Biennial Meeting, 2021
9. First Prize, Bachelor Thesis Competition, Jiangsu Province, China, 2018
10. First Prize, Bachelor Thesis Competition, Nanjing Normal University, 2018
11. University Excellent Graduate, Nanjing Normal University, 2017
12. Second Prize, Psychological Research Paper Competition, Academic Conference of Psychology in Jiangsu Province, 2016
13. First Prize, Best Research Paper Competition, Contemporary Educational Practice and Teaching Research (Chinese Journal), 2015
14. Merit Student Award, Nanjing Normal University, 2013-2015

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

GUEST LECTURER

1. ***Occidental College, September 21, 2024***
“Development of social learning: How do children learn from others’ words?”
2. ***Tsing Hua University (Taiwan), May 20, 2022.***
“How to teach effective lessons in a Hong Kong kindergarten?”
3. ***Educational Psychology, HKUST, October 26, 2021***
“How can educational psychology promote learning in kindergarten?”
4. ***Social Psychology, HKUST, November 30, 2020***
“The psychology of happiness.”

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

MEDIA COVERAGE

1. No, You don’t get an A for effort, *The New York Times*, December 2024.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/26/opinion/school-grades-a-quantity-quality.html>
2. Others’ words, not firsthand experience, shape scientific and religious belief formation, HKUST study finds. *Eurek Alert*, American Association for the Advancement of Science, June 2024. <https://www.eurekalert.org/news-releases/1046982>

*Also featured by *HKUST website, HKUST WeChat, HKUST Linkedin, Beijing-Hong Kong Academic Exchange Center website, World News, Science Daily, Science Blog, Psychreg, The Mirage, Bioengineer.org, Phys.org etc.*

3. Why people reward innate talent over hard work, *British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)*, May 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20230517-why-people-reward-innate-talent-over-hard-work>
4. Guiding 3-year-olds to socialize with peers in kindergarten, *Slow Growth Magazine* [Chinese], April 2023.
5. Understanding preschool-aged children's habits to collect "junk," *Slow Growth Magazine* [Chinese], March 2023.
6. Preference for naturally talented over hard workers emerges in childhood, HKUST researchers find, *Eurek Alert*, American Association for the Advancement of Science, February 2023. <https://www.eurekalert.org/news-releases/978227>

*Also featured by *HKUST Website, Wen Wei Po (香港文匯網), Science Daily, Science Blog, Psychreg, The Mirage, Bioengineer.org, Phys.org etc.*

7. Helping parents to rebuild secure relationships with children after separations, *Slow Growth Magazine* [Chinese], November 2022.
8. Understanding preschool-aged children's sensitive period for order, *Slow Growth Magazine* [Chinese], May 2022.

INVITED TALKS

1. "How do children learn from others using epistemic and social cues?" Culture and Child Development Lab, East China Normal University, China. May 18, 2024.
2. "Preferring naturals or strivers? Examining the early development of the naturalness preference." Invited Speaker for Early Childhood Development session, The 2nd International Conference of Early Childhood Development and Care, Hangzhou, China, May 13, 2024.
3. "From whom should I learn? Different cues shaping social learning preferences." Developmental Lunch, Department of Psychology, University of Virginia, VA, United States. February 27, 2024.
4. "Are you naturally talented or hardworking? Examining the development of evaluations toward individuals with different sources of achievement." Social Cognitive Development Lab, Department of Psychology, University of California San Diego, La Jolla, CA, United States [virtual]. May 10, 2023.
5. "Whom do I prefer? Examining the impact of perceived warmth and competence on children and adults' socializing and learning preferences." Harris and Rowe's Lab, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, United States. September 27, 2022.

WORKSHOPS

1. "Be a good-enough parent to facilitate children's learning." Parenting Forum, Hebei, China. May 19, 2022.
2. "Statistics workshop: What is moderating effect?" HKUST, Hong Kong, China. May 6 & November 2, 2020.

3. "Learn with fun: How to design play-based learning activities for kindergarteners." Tong-yuan Kindergarten, Jiangsu, China. June 11, 2019.
4. "Get ready for graduate schools: How to build a study plan that works?" Excellent Graduate Forum, School of Psychology, NNU, Jiangsu, China. May 28, 2017.

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

Guest Editor

Journal of Experimental Psychology: General (JCR-Q1)

Editorial Board Member

Personality and Individual Differences (JCR-Q1)

Professional Affiliations

American Psychological Association (APA), APA Division 7: Developmental Psychology, Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD), SRCD Asian Caucus, Cognitive Development Society (CDS), International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development (ISSBD)

Journal Reviewer

Cognition, Child Development, Developmental Science, Developmental Psychology, Personality and Individual Differences, Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, Journal of Family and Marriage, Infant and Child Development, Journal of Cognition and Development, Early Education and Development, Social Psychology of Education, Frontiers in Psychology, Asian Journal of Social Psychology, Cogent Education

Conference Reviewer

SRCD 2025

Book Co-Reviewer

Mental Health Education Textbooks (for Primary Schools in China), Encyclopedia of Mental Health 2nd Edition (Chinese Translation)

Award/Grant Committee Member

2025 APA Early Career Research Grant