UC SANTA BARBARA

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Howard Chiang honored for career in queer history and Sinophone studies

The Dan David Prize, the largest history prize in the world, today announced its 2026 winners. Among them is Howard Chiang, UC Santa Barbara historian of modern East Asian thought and culture with an emphasis on the critical study of science, medicine, race, gender and sexuality. He is the first winner from East Asia of the prestigious award.

“I have been told countless times that my work is not ‘historical’ enough throughout my career,” said Chiang. “This recognition confirms my commitment to promoting the study of history as a creative, imaginative and ethical undertaking for a brighter, more socially just future.”

Chiang is a pioneer of the field of Sinophone studies, which reconceives regions such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and Asian America, where the category of “Chinese” fails to capture the complexity and diversity of cultural expression.

Chiang’s first book “After Eunuchs: Science, Medicine, and the Transformation of Sex in Modern China” (Columbia University Press, 2018), analyzes the history of sex change in China. His second book, “Transtopia in the Sinophone Pacific” (Columbia University Press, 2021), proposes a new paradigm for doing transgender history in which geopolitics assumes central importance. Chiang received his Ph.D. from Princeton University in 2012.

The nine winners will each receive $300,000 in recognition of their achievements and to support their future endeavors. The winners, all in early and mid stages of their careers, are historians and archaeologists whose research spans the Americas, East Asia, Europe and even how events in outer space have impacted human history.

This year marks five years since the prize was relaunched to focus on historical research and practice. With the addition of the 2026 cohort, the Dan David Prize has recognized 45 scholars and practitioners across six continents, awarding more than $13.5 million to support groundbreaking historical work.

“At a time when research in the humanities is threatened by political intervention as well as ongoing funding cuts, the prize allows winners the freedom to engage in unencumbered research and continue to provide sophisticated and nuanced insights into the human past,” said Tim Cole, historian and academic advisor to the Dan David Prize. “This year’s nine winners join a growing community of scholars whose collective work enriches the tapestry of historical scholarship with new threads of research and creative reimaginings of familiar historical landscapes.”

Following an open nomination process, the winners were selected by an international committee of experts. This year’s selection committee members work at leading academic institutions including Oxford University, the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Sciences Po in Paris.

“Five years ago, we relaunched this prize with a conviction that supporting historians at pivotal moments in their careers could make a lasting difference,” said Ariel David, Dan David Prize board member and son of Dan David, the founder of the prize. “Our past winners are using their awards to acquire critical research tools, produce films and build community programs that bring history to life for new audiences. This year’s winners continue that tradition. Their work spans from the Balkans to Peru, from medieval cathedrals to modern theme parks.”

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