Michael Wang

CIBC Scholarship 2026 – 2027



Programme: PhD, Modern History, University of St Andrews
Biography (IN ENGLISH): Michael Wang is a PhD candidate in Modern History at the University of St Andrews, where he researches the formation of Han identity during the Republican era (1912-1949) and the early People's Republic (1949-1954). His work examines how ideas of “Han” and “Chinese” were debated and redefined during a period of revolution, war and state-building, challenging the common assumption that a singular Chinese national identity emerged naturally in the 20th Century. By exploring how Western racial theories intersected with traditional Chinese understandings of ethnicity, nationhood, and empire, he is developing new perspectives on the historical construction of modern Chinese identity and contributing to wider discussions on nationalism, race, and state formation.
Originally from Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Michael completed a Joint Honours degree in History and Political Science at the University of Ottawa, graduating summa cum laude. His interest in modern China grew from questions about nationalism and identity, beginning with his undergraduate research on Mao Zedong’s early Cold War foreign policy. The publication of this work encouraged him to pursue archival research and doctoral study at the University of St Andrews where he later completed a Master of Letters in Modern History with Distinction in 2024. He has twice been elected by postgraduate students to represent the School of History, reflecting his commitment to the wider academic community.
Michael combines traditional archival methods with emerging digital humanities techniques. His work has taken him to archives in Taipei and mainland China to examine government records, newspapers, and popular magazines to understand how concepts of Han identity, frontiers, and nationality evolved across official policy and public discourse. He is developing computational approaches using large textual datasets, geographic information systems (QGIS), and large language models to analyse long-term changes in political language. His broader research interests include the global circulation of ideas surrounding race, nationalism and eugenics and a collaborative project comparing Republican China and Scandinavia.
Michael is passionate about teaching and public engagement. As a Graduate Teaching Assistant he encourages students to think critically, engage with diverse perspectives, and develop practical research and communication skills. His experience supporting students as an Assistant Warden has further strengthened his commitment to leadership, service and working with people from diverse backgrounds.
Michael’s research has particular relevance for Canada. As home to one of the world’s largest and most diverse Chinese diasporas, Canada can benefit from a deeper historical understanding of the identities, ideas and experiences that shape Chinese communities today. He hopes to apply his rigorous historical research to inform evidence-based decision making to strengthen Canada-Asia relations, inform public debate, and support organisations navigating a complex global environment. Michael is deeply grateful to the Canadian Centennial Scholarship Fund for supporting Canadian scholars and for fostering a community committed to advancing Canadian scholarship and international engagement.

CCSF scholarships are funded by the Maple Leaf Trust, supported by charitable donations and named scholarship sponsors.
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