

Denise Chong



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In the 1980s, [Denise Chong](#), an economist, worked as an economic adviser to the Liberal Prime Minister of the time, Pierre Trudeau. It was in 1987, in China with her husband, a journalist, and her mother, that she began to uncover the lost history of her family's past.

Her well-known book, *The Concubine's Children* (Penguin 1996), began as a cover story for *Saturday Night* in 1988. The article generated so many questions that Chong was inspired to find out and tell more of the story. She embarked upon the memoir that took years to research and write and reads like a novel.

Chong reconstructed her family's history from pictures and from information gleaned from her mother and from her grandfather's original family whom she rediscovered in China. Chan Sam, her grandfather, came to Canada first as a sojourner in 1913, to seek his fortune in "Gold Mountain," and brought a concubine to keep him company in the new world. That concubine's daughter was Chong's mother.

The history of Chong's family reveals the historic backdrop of the twentieth century. Her grandfather left his Chinese village long before the revolution, and arrived in Canada at a time when Canadian institutions were racially biased against Chinese, who had few rights. Part of the story plays out in the Vancouver Chinatown of the mid-sixties, a very different place from the post-multiculturalism Vancouver that has evolved since the Charter of Rights and Freedoms came into effect in 1982.

*The Concubine's Children* won the [Edna Staebler Award](#) for Creative Non-fiction, the City of Vancouver Book Award and the Vancity Book Prize. It was shortlisted for the Governor General's Award and spent more than a year and a half on the *Globe and Mail* bestseller list. It has also been translated into several languages.