



# Lan Samantha Chang

“*I studied our reflections. No one seeing the two of us would fail to recognize that we belonged together. And why was that? I wondered--was it only our round faces, our dusky skin? Or was it written, indelibly, in our faces and our bodies, that we were not and would never be women who expected or felt that they deserved to be loved the most?*

— Hunger

”

## Quick Facts

- \* Born in 1965
- \* Chinese-American fiction writer
- \* Published her first story when she was 28 in the *Atlantic Monthly*

## Biography

“Sometimes I wonder if I would have become a writer if I had been raised in a larger, more diverse community . . . My childhood in Appleton [Wisc. ] prepared me for writing -- for observing and recording -- because I grew up feeling like an outsider . . . I can not remember a time when I was not conscious of being different from the majority of people around me.”

With these words, critically acclaimed author Lan Samantha Chang (b. 1965), the author of the award winning novella/short story collection *Hunger: A Novella and Stories* (W.W. Norton), describes her early years in Appleton, Wisconsin with three sisters. As a fiction writer’s workshop presenter at the 2003 Iowa Summer Writing Festival, Chang has continued to astound the literary world with her insights and explorations of identity and citizenship, gender and culture primarily through the lens of Chinese-American immigrant.

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# Lan Samantha Chang

## Biography continued

Chang further explores this identity through the skillful execution of deliberately concise prose designed to unveil the multifaceted existence of her characters, their desires, and the often fragile relationships between immigrant and nation. Chang also explores the interplay between identity and heritage through the eyes of women and children, especially as they struggle to navigate the new landscape of their existence.

Mary Spicuzza, a reviewer from the *Metro Santa Cruz* newspaper, writes, “. . . while entrancing readers, she [Chang] applies an acute understanding of culture shock to fashion very real portraits of the immigrant experience. Chang writes of alienation and loneliness, especially as experienced by Chinese immigrant women scalded in America’s melting pot.” As Spicuzza writes, Chang’s work is interwoven with the stark themes of isolation and alienation through which she filters the concept of hunger. What are the characters hungry for? Self. Safety. Community. Belonging. The past. The future. Chang explores first generation immigrant experiences and how they relate to the performances of changing cultural identity and the demands of second and following generations.

Chang continues to develop the themes of loss through portraits of restless discontent by highlighting attempts to maneuver through the deliberate act of forgetting. As Chang illustrates, when elements of social interconnectedness are disordered and incomplete, humans sometimes develop a hunger so intense that it borders on an obsessive desire to possess and participate in these relationships. Unfortunately, those most desperate are often the least likely candidates for membership.

In the novella *Hunger*, for instance, Chang describes the journey of a desperate man swimming through turbulent water to a distant ship, maintaining a death grip on the one item that he hoped would put him on the path to being “American.” Tian, a violinist equating his acceptance within the musical community with a measure of belonging to the larger “American community,” struggles to bridge the gap between the culturally constructed identities of Chinese immigrant and American participant. Finding that he is unable to do so himself, he temporarily retreats to a violently dark and private world from which he emerges only after discovering the potential of fulfilling his hunger through his daughter’s ability to play the violin.



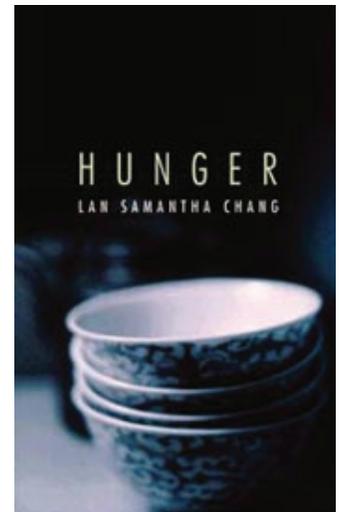
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## Biography continued

Chang's work continues to explore the themes of family dissonance against the backdrop of negotiating the different desires and influences between first generation immigrants and their children. The complex experiences of parents caught between the need to fulfill the hunger that had originally been their impetus for flight, the harsh realities of lives that reflect little of those original dreams, and their children for whom the experiences of identity are drastically different, continue to be a basis for much of Chang's work.

Writing with stunning clarity, Chang reveals the intensely personal motivations of her characters. Chang has received numerous fellowships and awards throughout her relatively short writing career. She published her first story in the *Atlantic Monthly* at the age of twenty-eight. Her work has twice been included in the Best American Short Stories Collection, and she has received the Bunting Fellowship at Radcliffe as well as additional fellowships from Princeton University, the National Endowment for the Arts, a Wallace Stegner Fellowship at Stanford University, Harvard University and the University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop (where she received her MFA in fiction writing).

Chang has been honored as the California Book Award Silver Medalist, as a finalist for the *Los Angeles Times* Book Award, and with a Bay Area Book Award. Her work has been nominated for the PEN Center USA West Award and the PEN Hemingway Literature Prize. Her novel *Inheritance* was awarded a PEN Beyond Margins Award in 2005. Chang worked as a Briggs-Copeland Lecturer in fiction at Harvard University until beginning her position, for which she was selected in April 2005, as Director of the University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop.





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## Selected Bibliography

### Works by the author

*Inheritance* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2004)

*Hunger: A Novella and Stories* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1998)