

# Cultural Transition: A Study on the Select Fiction of Amy Tan and Sandra Cisneros

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## Abstract

Amy Tan and Sandra Cisneros are Chinese and Mexican writers settled in America. Their oeuvre of writings aspires to probe the cultural conflict encountered by the expatriates in their period of migration. Culture is an intangible aspect of social life. It varies tremendously from society to society. There is no concrete cultural pattern in the society. Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* are abounded with numerous cultural dynamics. The characters uphold traditional Chinese and Mexican cultures. However at one instance they instantly shift from their inherited culture to the culture of the mainstream. The present paper aims to analyse in depth the factors behind the rapid transition of immigrants and shows how they amalgamate into mainstream culture and generate identities distinct from the cultural identity they previously detained. The rapid evolution of characters is analyzed through four different stages that include honeymoon stage, frustration stage, adjustment stage and adaptation stage.

**Key words:** Expatriates, Cultural Pluralism, Cultural Evolution, Multiethnic identity.

Amy Tan and Sandra Cisneros hail from different parts of the world. However the authors meet in a common arena where prospects and opportunities are immense and chance to fulfill dreams are practicably doable. America is a unique place with hyped immigrants. It is a home for people of many different ethnic origins. Though it is land for native immigrants it also embraces people with differences. People migrate for numerous reasons however in the course of migration reflexively contribute their innate culture into migrated land thereby possibly making the ambience suitable for their existence.

Culture is an umbrella term derived from the Latin word 'cult' or 'cuts' which means tilling or cultivating or refining. In broader sense 'culture' encompasses the social behavior in human societies as well as beliefs, customs, laws and habits of the individuals in these groups.

Human acquire culture all the way through the process of enculturation and socialization. Society is compressed of manifold cultures. Culture is learned and it varies immensely from ages and time.

Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* and Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* are abounded with numerous cultural dynamics. In the novels, characters uphold traditional Chinese and Mexican cultures. However at one instance they instantly shift from their inherited culture to the culture of the mainstream. The present paper analyses the transition of the expatriates under four different stages that includes honeymoon stage, frustration stage, adjustment stage and adaptation stage. The chapter broadly delves into each stage that contributes to the transition of immigrants.

In honeymoon phase, expatriates are excited about their new ambiance and they eagerly show their curiosity in exploring the surroundings. Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* poignantly unveils this phase in the first generation expatriates. *The Joy Luck club* recounts the relationship between four Chinese women with that of their American born daughters. These four individually independent women have their own dreams and that prompted them to migrate from China to America. Initially after their migration, they unanimously expressed their excitement for the new place and culture.

In the novel *The House on Mango Street*, the protagonist Esperanza was initially excited to move from Mexico. After migrating to the Mango Street, the ambiance energized her to pursue her passion,

She doesn't want to be a TV weather girl. Nor does she want to marry and have babies. Not yet. Maybe later, but there are so many other things she must do in her lifetime first. Travel. Learn how to dance the tango. Publish a book. Live in other cities. Win a National Endowment for the Arts award. See the Northern Lights. Jump out of a cake.  
(HMS xv)

This passion of Esperanza unveils her being in the first phase of transition.

The second phase of transition comprise of frustration stage. In this phase, a strong sense of excitement in the initial stage turns into discomfort for the expatriates. During this stage, immigrants lose their patience and squander in anger most of the times. The core reasons for their aggravation are miscommunication and failure to understand gestures. Language is often well thought-out to be the most exigent factor for the immigrants.

In the novel *The Joy Luck Club*, understanding the foreign language was almost a challenge to all the first generation immigrants. However the second generation expatriates finds more flexible in adopting bilingual in their day to day lives. The daughter of Suyuan Woo speaks both English and Mandarin. "These kinds of explanations made me feel my mother and I spoke two different languages, which we did. I talked to her in English, she answered back in Chinese" (JLC 26).

Sandra Cisneros also uncovers the frustration stage of the expatriates through the character Esperanza. In *The House on a Mango Street*, Esperanza migrates to Chicago with hopes of fulfilling her passion of writing. However all her desires got thwarted when outsiders

discriminate her for her Hispanic identity. “Those who don’t know any better come into our neighborhood scared. They think we’re dangerous. They think we will attack them with shiny knives. They are stupid people who are lost and got here by mistake” (HMS 28). Whenever the outsiders happen to drive down the streets, they assume the residents to be dangerous. This open statement of outsiders had created a greater impact on almost all the inhabitants.

In the adjustment stage, immigrants unconsciously begin to feel more familiar and comfortable with the culture, food, people and ambience of the new surroundings. Expatriates understand the cultural differences, but negotiate it in order to fiddle with the new ambience. Moreover language becomes recognizable in the adjustment stage. In this phase, migrants will either adjust effectively to reach cultural integration or on the contrary withstand marginalization.

The four Chinese women in the novel *The Joy Luck Club* migrate to America with different dreams and desires. These four women are not interrelated in any ways, yet the joy luck club helped the immigrants to overcome their past trauma. Chinese women’s major source of relief buster from current economic tension and financial crisis is feasting and gathering in joy luck club. During the gatherings, they share their happiness, grieves, and expectations and ends the day by playing Mahjong game. Apart from this, they also exchange and share food with each other.

K.C. Chang, a well renowned Chinese observer in Food cuisine, highlights the manifold significance of the consumption of food, where he states that,

I have pointed out earlier that the Chinese people are especially preoccupied with food, and that food is at the center of, or at least it accompanies or symbolizes, many social interactions....Consequently, they inevitably use food—of which there are countless variations, many more subtle and more expressive than the tongue can convey—to help speak the language that constitutes a part of every social interaction. (15-16)

In the novel, the four Chinese immigrant women host party in joy luck club during every weekend. They prepare traditional foods as well as modern cuisine including dumplings, rice noodles, boiled peanuts and shrimp dipped into spicy bean-curd sause.

In *The House on Mango Street*, adjustment phase becomes possible in the immigrant character Esperanza. In the beginning, Esperanza was not happy, because she was isolated and racially discriminated in school and public, “You know what you are, Esperanza? You are like the cream of wheat cereal. You are like the lumps.Yeah, and you’re foot flees, that’s you.Chicken lips.Rosemary, Dalia, Lily...Cockroach jelly...”(HMS 38). However at one point of time, Esperanza realized that the only means to escape from racial slurs is to adjust with ways in American society and its culture. She learns the language of the migrated land passionately and ultimately the language gained her a remarkable status in the American society. She becomes a Hispanic writer and led an exemplar life to all the women struggling from bigotry and bias.

The final phase in the transition is adaptation stage. In this stage, immigrants adopt and accept the customs, habits and cultural practices of the new land. This phase contributes to the successful integration of host and home cultures. This period is also referred to as the bicultural

stage. In this crucial transition period, expatriates initially undergo transition shock such as boredom, anger, feeling of helplessness and withdrawal, impulsivity, irritability and homesickness. However the expatriates with accumulated societal knowledge try to overcome all the diverse emotions and blend themselves with American society.

In the chosen novels, expatriates adapt rapidly to the American cultures. In the novel, *The Joy Luck Club*, both the first generation and second generation immigrants accept the bicultural reality in the course of time. Mothers understand the inevitability of American customs in their daughter's life and daughters understand significantly the need of the culture of their homeland. The first generation immigrants assume to raise their children without the shade of American idealisms and principles. But the second generation broke their parent's notion simply through embracing Americanism in all the aspects of their lives.

Cisneros has plethora of immigrant characters and the most significant character who accepts and adapts to the American culture is Mamacita. Mamacita migrates to the Mango Street for the sake of her husband. Being a Spanish woman, she finds English language and the people outside the Mango Street to be menacing. She creates a homely place in her house by listening to Spanish radio, and the homesick songs, and stays in this limited space. She never allows any foreign intruders in her house. She even expects the visitors to speak with her only in Spanish. However Mamacita comprehends that cultural pluralism is foreseeable through her son. On one occasion her baby boy, who has just begun to talk, starts to sing the Pepsi commercial he hears on T.V and this incident lets Mamacita to be broken forever. Ultimately Amy Tan and Sandra Cisneros explicitly unveil the significance of cultural transition in immigrants. Cultural changeover is an inevitable process for the expatriates and both the writers have meticulously brought down the trauma of the migrants in their work of arts.

### Works Cited

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