

The Study on Chicana Images in *The House on Mango Street*

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The House on Mango Street is written by Sandra Cisneros who is a Mexican American. It gains more popularity among all social classes in America. Most researchers analyze this novel from the perspectives of feminism, post-colonialism, and post-modernism, but this paper puts emphasis on Chicana images from the perspectives of economic, social status, and masculine hegemony. This paper helps readers understand the living conditions of Chicana images and appeals us to pay more attention to this group of people.

Keywords: Mexican American, Mango Street, Chicana

Introduction

Chicana or Chinano is an identity for some Mexican Americans in the United States. The term of *Chicana* refers to some people who are at the edge of society in America. Owing to the war between America and Mexico in the middle of nineteenth century, America grabbed much land from Mexico, and many Mexicans became the American citizens. That is to say, they are the foreigners in their native land (Zhao, 2006). With the prosperous development of Chicana movement, these people are eager to transform their social status in this process. More and more Mexican immigrants decide to live in America. On the one hand, these Mexican Americans struggle for their equality in political and economical rights. On the other hand, they are eager to obtain a sense of national identity. They want to become an American based on the Mexican culture. To step into the upper class, they must consider their national identities. As we all know, Sandra Cisneros is a Mexican American writer, so she depicts some Chicana images in her works, which makes us pay more attention to these people with double national identities.

Chicana Images in *The House on Mango Street*

The House on Mango Street is divided into 44 short stories. Most of the stories do not have the relationship with the others. But we can find some implications from each story. It shows many Mexican American characters with different personalities. This paper analyzes different Chicana images from three perspectives.

Chicana Images From Economic Perspective

At the beginning of this novel, we know that Esperanza has moved house for many times. Now she lives on Mango Street. According to this novel, before that she lived on Loomis on the third floor, and before that she lived on Keeler. Before Keeler it was Paulina, and before that she cannot remember (Cisneros, 2007). No

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matter where Esperanza lives, she must give rent to landlord because the house does not belong to her. Not until she gets to Mango Street does she move again and again. The house on Mango Street completely belongs to her family, but it looks very shabby. It is small and red with tight steps in front and windows are so small that you think they are holding their breath (Cisneros, 2007). She is eager to live in a big house with a beautiful garden but her mother tells her it can be achieved if they win the lottery. Virginia Woolf (1934) once said in *A Room of One's Own*, if women are eager to completely obtain the independence, they must meet these two demands: One is that they must have their own home, and the other is that they must achieve the economic independence. Esperanza has a dream that she yearns for a house belonging to her in the life, but she still remembers her responsibility that she will come back to Mango Street in order that she wants to help these people who have no ability to get rid of the fetter.

On Mango Street, a girl named Marin also wears a pair of stocking that looks so cheap and gets lots of cosmetics that are experimental articles on the counter. She has no money to buy the makeup so she manages to get free cosmetics from her workshop. We all know that each girl wants to dress beautiful so they buy lots of beautiful clothes. In this novel, these girls who live on Mango Street always wear some worn and outdated shoes. Even if they are eager to wear the fashionable shoes, their mothers buy the same style shoes which look so ponderous for them because these shoes are cheaper and more durable. Generally, the girls who live on Mango Street cannot dress beautifully because their money can barely maintain their living.

Chicana Images From Social Status

This name, Esperanza, contains many implications in different languages. In English, it means hope while it has the opposite implication in Spanish. Her grandmother who holds the traditional view all her life uses this name but she does not have the strength to cast off this fetter. Now it is the protagonist's name, which reflects the same destiny as her grandmother's. So Esperanza wants to change her name because this name affects her social destiny.

When Esperanza moves to Mango Street, she makes acquaintance with Cathy and they become friends. Because of the identity of white person, Cathy's family decides to move away from Mango Street. Cathy says that there are more and more immigrants from Mexico swarming into this community. She is not willing to live in this mixing society so she will move to the north of America which accommodates many white people and Native Americans. Some white people are afraid of these black immigrants when they enter into the Latino-immigration community with no prudence. They think that these immigrants are so dangerous because of their race and skin color, so many Mexican Americans who have little knowledge engage in the low-waged job. Even if they exert all their efforts, it is of great difficulty for them to have the equal social status or to get rid of the discrimination of their race. That is the reason why most of white people are not willing to live together with immigrants. And the immigrants are so confused between the two nation identities.

In this novel, the author depicts that Esperanza is eager to have the opportunity of having lunch with her classmates in the school restaurant. She begs her mother to make a rice sandwich for her in advance. When she takes her rice sandwich to the restaurant, these nuns mock her for her sandwich has no meat. Besides, the nuns also consider that Esperanza does not have right to have lunch in the restaurant. The restaurant only opens for Americans, not for her. The nuns' opinion represents the views of the public. The American society thinks the connection with Mexican immigrants should be avoided (Shen & Zhang, 2012). From above analysis, it can be concluded that most Mexican immigrants are despised because of their lower social status, so it is difficult for

this vulnerable group to integrate successfully into the American way of life.

Chicana Images From Masculine Hegemony

In this novel, the author depicts many females that are suppressed by their husbands. This part analyzes four females including Marin, Rafaela, Sally, and Alicia who are different from the first three girls because Alicia has courage to fight against the masculine hegemony, which shows the sharp contrast to Chicana images.

Marin who lives with Louie's family cannot go out of the house because she must stay at home to take care of the Louie's sisters but Marin does not want to live in this way. Her wish is finding the job in the centre of this city. She thinks that the best jobs are all in the prosperous blocks where most of the girls dress beautifully and they can wait for a man to marry them. We cannot see Marin until her aunt goes back home. Every evening, Marin sits on the floor and waits for a boy to notice her. Her dream is that a boy can marry her and has the ability to improve her life. It can be concluded that Marin puts all her hope on men. During that period, all people think that women must depend on the men in order to live a better life.

Rafaela's destiny is the same as Marin's. Rafaela is always locked by her husband because her husband thinks she is beautiful. At that time, Rafaela leans on the edge of the window. Her dream is singing and dancing in a bar someday but it cannot be achieved. She must obey her husband all the time. If her husband does not permit her to go out, she will stay at home even if she is not willing to stay alone. These two people are the representatives of obeying their husbands.

Sally shows little difference from them. Sally depends on her father before her marriage and relies on her husband the rest of her life. Sally always youthens her appearance with makeup and wears the fashion clothes. Her father regards beauty as poison so he does not permit Sally to go out. Sally has to go home with no hesitation after school. Sometimes she hopes that she can go away from Mango Street and have a house with many trees and broad sky. In *Le Deuxième Sexe* that is written by Simone de Beauvoir (1998), she said that a woman after making up is still herself, but her will is transformed in order to obtain the male's desire. In this novel, it tells that Sally's father even flogs her owing to her beauty. Her father thinks that she will elope with a boy someday. Even if her father is so cruel, she never rebels her father. She wants to get married quickly in order to escape her father. For Sally, she gets rid of the burden imposed on by her father but she traps into another fetter. It is her unfortunate destiny.

Alicia is an unusual girl in the society. Alicia is a girl who is eager to make change in her life. Even if she is scared of the males in her family, she wants to rebel this fetter by herself. Her father orders her to make breakfasts every morning and wants her to work in the factory. Alicia does not want to live in this way so she goes to college with no hesitation. Alicia studies hard in the college in order to have power to escape this abnormal society.

Through these characters, we find some girls have no courage to rebel the masculine hegemony while a few girls are brave enough to change this abnormal situation by their own efforts. These brave girls also remember their responsibilities that they should help more girls out of this fetter.

Conclusion

This paper analyzes Chicana images from three perspectives including economic situation, social status, and masculine hegemony. The house is referred to many times in this novel, and it is Esperanza's dream. If Esperanza wants to be independent, she must have her own house. Furthermore, some Chicana women are also

treated unfairly by American society because of their identities. At last, we find that many women are suppressed by males. They are afraid of struggling for their rights but Esperanza is an exception. She is a brave girl and fights against the fetter for herself and for others who have the same fate with her. Esperanza is the model who takes the pen as the tool in order to fight for a place in this American society. This paper offers us three perspectives, which makes us think deeply about Chicana images and arouses our attention to this group.

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