

A Deconstructive Study of Celeste Ng's *Everything I Never Told You**

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Celeste Ng is a contemporary Chinese-American female writer. Her novel *Everything I Never Told You* won the first place in Amazon. com's No.1 Best Book of 2014. Her gentle and delicate style of writing, precise and restrained diction and serious themes aroused strong repercussions. This paper is proposed to analyze the deconstruction tendencies of the novel from the perspective of deconstruction, showing absurdities and harm of monism incisively and vividly through the analysis of the following three parts of binary oppositions in the novel: males and females, strong cultures and weak cultures, parents and children, which illustrate the reconstruction rather than destruction and provide the possibility of rebuilding the identity and culture of the Asian-American.

Keywords: deconstruction, subvert, binary opposition, *Everything I Never Told You*

I . Introduction

Celeste Ng is a contemporary Chinese American female writer. The publication of *Everything I Never Told You* in 2014 brought her into attention, which filled the gap of Chinese American writers in the literary circles of Europe and America. This novel is composed and restrained, and its story arrangement is exquisite. Once published, it has been widely praised, and thus became the most powerful and popular book as a dark horse in 2014. It has not only become a best seller in *The New York Times*, but also won the best book of 2014 selected by countless media including Amazon.com. Consequently, scholars at home and abroad have conducted various theoretical analysis and research on Ng and her novels.

In numerous journal papers and academic dissertations, there are only a handful of papers starting from deconstruction, and most of them discuss it from the perspective of culture and traditional marriage ethics. On this basis, this paper analyzes the binary opposition about male and female, and parents-children relationship and the deconstruction tendency conveyed in the novel, thus subverting the traditional deep-rooted concept of pallocentrism and white cultural supremacy, encouraging Chinese ethnic groups and female groups to break the

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inherent stereotype, regain cultural self-confidence, face up to their own potential, and break the shackles of racial discrimination.

1.1 Literature Review

Studies on this novel are various from many different perspectives. But due to its late publication, the research results and achievements on this novel are not very fruitful.

1.1.1 Research Abroad

The publication of *Everything I Never Told You* has aroused strong repercussions in the United States. The commentary and book review articles emerged one after another. Alexander Chee from The New York Times Book Review commented: "If we know this story, we haven't seen it yet in American fiction, not until now... What emerges is a deep, heartfelt portrait of a family struggling with its place in history, and a young woman hoping to be the fulfillment of that struggle. This is, in the end, a novel about the burden of being the first of your kind—a burden you do not always survive" (Chee, 2014, p. 16). The article "First Fiction 2014: Anticipated Debuts" published in *Writer* introduced Ng's life and her novel *Everything I Never Told You* to readers. It not only told the psychological harm to the growth caused by the discriminatory behavior encountered by the author when she was a child, but also took Lydia as an example to analyze the split of her personality, psychology and action caused by her parents' will, as well as the painful process that she is difficult to adapt to the surrounding environment as an outsider, and pointed out the defects of children in mixed-race families and the uncertainty of their identity positioning.

However, due to the short publication time of the novel, research papers on this novel abroad are very limited, and most of the articles are discussed at international conferences by scholars. At the Proceedings of the 2016 International Conference on Arts, Design and Contemporary Education, Yan Yin and Junping Liu explored the cultural conflicts encountered by Chinese ethnic groups in the mixed cultural space and vividly reproduced the dilemma of "the other" from the perspective of Chinese-American in "'The Other' Trapped in a Bicultural Dilemma. An Analysis of Celeste Ng's *Everything I Never Told You*". At Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Culture, Education and Economic Development of Modern Society, Yuan Shen and Ting Yang analyzed the ethical relationship of marriage, parenthood and siblings in "Family Ethics in Celeste Ng's *Everything I Never Told You*". At Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Contemporary Education, Social Sciences and Humanities, Yuan Shen and Jinyue Zhais' "Lydia's Identity Crisis in *Everything I Never Told You*" analyzed Lydia's identity crisis based on Erickson's theory of self-identity and personality. Dania Abdelsalam's dissertation "Tension Within Immigrant Identity in South Asian and Asian Characters in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *Everything I Never Told You*, and *Disgraced*" explored the dilemma of Asian immigrants seeking identity and cultural recognition in the United States.

To sum up, studies of the novel in foreign literature mostly focus on the analysis of ethnicity and cultural ethics, which show the difficult survival process of Chinese-American mixed-race families in heterogeneous cultural context.

1.1.2 Research at Home

In May, 2015, *Everything I Never Told You* began to be published in China, which attracted the attention of scholars. There are 92 journal papers and 38 dissertations so far. Researches are mainly about three elements: content analysis, narrative techniques and translation studies.

Firstly, from the perspective of the content of the novel, journal papers mostly focus on trauma writing, minority groups, family ethics and self-identity construction. Luyao Zhang's "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma: A Study of Trauma Narrative in *Everything I Never Told You*" adopts the trauma theory to analyze the traumatic experiences and causes of family members in the novel from the perspective of psychological trauma and cultural trauma, and then reveals that narrating trauma and reflecting over the past are helpful to heal trauma and rebuild self. Dongli Wu's "Interrogating 'Model Minority': A Family Systems Reading of *Everything I Never Told You*" analyzes the internal and external relations of ethnic families under the political discourse of "Model Minorities", as well as the alienation effects of external social pressures such as race and gender have on James's emotional field. Xiaoling Wang and Xingxing Li discussed the relationship between white gaze and ethnic shame, analyzed the protagonist's failed attempt to integrate into the mainstream society through self-denial, and demonstrated the initiative of shame emotion in "The Agency of Shame: Affect and the Construction of Chinese American Subjectivity in *Everything I Never Told You*". Secondly, from the perspective of narrative skills, Hua Wang, in the journal "Tragedy of Escape and Cultural Pathology: Celeste Ng's Narrative Ethics in *Everything I Never Told You*", embarks from the narrative ethics analysis and combines the holistic theoretical perspective of Marxism and the cultural criticism of psychoanalytic tradition to interpret the "Tragedy of Escape" as the core narrative structure of *Everything I Never Told You*. Huihui Huang's "Time, Personality, and Self-Schema: *Everything I Never Told You* and the Paradigm of Trauma Cognitive Narrative" analyzes that the novel's multi-layered time narrative shaped the experiential and free time, formed the confrontation and correction of Lydia's failure of forming a coherent view of time, and revealed the possibilities and means for characters and readers to finally reconstruct perceptive and insightful self-schema. Thirdly, from the perspective of translation studies, Ziyu Yang discusses how the translator's choice of Chinese four-character words and characteristic words will affect the translation of literary works in the process of English-Chinese Translation by taking the English novel *Everything I Never Told You* as an example.

In a word, the academic circles have studied and discussed this novel in many aspects, but few people have discussed it from the perspective of deconstruction. Some articles only discuss the identity dilemma and crisis of ethnic minorities in the United States from the perspective of deconstruction, thus leaving a certain space for this paper to discuss.

1.2 Deconstruction

At the end of 19th century, Nietzsche declared that God is dead and demanded that all values should be reassessed. His rebellious thoughts have had a far-reaching impact on the West since then. Nietzsche's philosophy, as an ideological trend questioning rationality and subverting tradition, has become one of the theoretical sources of deconstruction. The other two important ideological movements that enlightened and nourished deconstruction are Heidegger's phenomenology and European leftist critical theory. May 1968 events in France was only a flash in the pan, and radical scholars were compelled to turn to the deeper dismantling of

academic ideas. They knew that capitalism was deeply rooted and hard to shake, but they were determined to destroy and disintegrate all kinds of powerful and advanced foundations on which it depended, from its language, beliefs, regulations and systems to academic norms and power networks. Deconstruction came into being under this background. In 1966, Derrida delivered a speech entitled "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourses of Human Science" at Johns Hopkins University, which was regarded as the beginning of deconstruction. Critical theories and strategies of deconstruction mainly include anti-logocentrism, differance, supplementarity and intertextuality. Heidegger took the lead in exploring the existing problems and logos problems in the history of western philosophy and proposing "destruction" which means to destroy. In Heidegger's view, the logos problem is very important, which not only involves the origin of western thought and language, but also fundamentally affects the relationship between modern Westerners and present existence.

As a descendant of Heidegger's thought in France, Derrida was deeply influenced by Heidegger's anti-metaphysics and anti-Logocentrism theory. He boldly put forward a set of strategies for the erosion and disintegration of Logics from the perspective of linguistics and semiotics. Jacques Derrida reformed and upgraded Heidegger's definition of "destruction" to replace the overwhelming meaning of demolishing, and he creatively proposed "deconstruction", which is unique in that it disintegrates the whole and at the same time establishes new meaning in fragments. The traditional logocentrism is concentrated in the hierarchical binary oppositions. In *Positions*, Derrida mentioned that:

To do justice to this necessity is to recognize that in a classical philosophical opposition we are not dealing with the peaceful coexistence of a vis-a-vis, but rather with a violent hierarchy. One of the two terms governs the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), or has the upper hand. To deconstruct the opposition, first of all, is to overturn the hierarchy. at a given moment. To overlook this phase of overturning is to forget the conflictual and subordinating structure of opposition. (Derrida, 1997, p. 41)

Destruction and destructiveness point to all existence and aim to exhaust them. However, deconstruction only means to dismantle. As the crucial representative of deconstruction, Derrida believes that deconstruction is first of all a challenge to the dominant western philosophical tradition, which is manifested in opposing all closed and rigid system such as metaphysics, logocentrism and phallogocentrism. "According to Derrida, whose work has led to the poststructuralist movement, there is no center or system of ideas outside of the text that enables us to understand them and interpret them in one way" (Berger, 1995, p. 25). In Derrida's view, deconstruction is not just a simple reversal of their original opposite positions. The fundamental problem lies in: deconstructionism holds that there are only some differences between the two opposites, and there is no hierarchical order which is superior or inferior. Moreover, there are a lot of mutual infiltration and mutual tolerance between the two opposites. From the late 1960s to the early 1990s, deconstruction began to shine brilliantly in America. A famous "Yale School" was formed at Yale University in the United States. It usually refers to four professors who are keen on deconstructing criticism: Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, Harold Bloom, and Geoffrey Hartman. The publication of *Deconstruction and Criticism* was seen as the manifesto of Yale School. The most creative view of Paul de Man is that he inherited and developed Nietzsche's rhetoric theory and makes it an important deconstruction strategy.

In *Everything I Never Told You*, there are many overlapping and conflicting meanings, and they show the dynamic and unstable relations, which makes deconstruction possible. Deconstruction can be divided into three

steps. The first step is to identify a binary opposition and show the hierarchical structure in this opposition. The second step is to reverse the temporarily hierarchy, namely, previously held worldviews' concepts or values. And the final step is to subvert the hierarchy in the binary opposition and assert that neither term in the opposition enjoys priority over the other. They coexist with each other, equal but different.

II. Embodiment of Deconstruction Tendencies

From the binary oppositions in *Everything I Never Told You*, including males and females, strong cultures and weak cultures, parents and children, this paper illustrates the reconstruction rather than destruction and provide the possibility of rebuilding the identity and culture of the Asian-American.

2.1 The Deconstruction Between Male and Female

The first pair of binary opposition is the hierarchy of male and female. According to Derrida's theory, the first step is to identify the dominant status of male, which can also be called phallogentrism. In the prevailing Western Christian culture, the *Bible* clearly described that God created Adam, then took a rib from him and created Eve. Back to the origin of human beings, women are the accessories of men, and they exist by the existence of men. The deep-rooted thought that men have inherent advantages over women penetrated Western culture firmly. Everyone takes it for granted that women should do housework and bring up offspring. When Marilyn wanted to take manual lessons with boys, her application was undoubtedly rejected, even though the principal understood that "she had been at the top of her class—girls and boys" (Ng, 2014, p. 27). So the principal "nodded and smiled as she made her case. Then he shook his head" (Ng, 2014, p. 27). "Some of the equipment in the shop may be difficult for you to use" (Ng, 2014, p. 27). When Marilyn sat in the back row of the home-ec classroom, she listened to her mother's repeated words for twelve years, "Everything a young lady needed to keep a house" (Ng, 2014, p. 28). Woman's life seems to be so tacitly arranged by the society.

In 1955, Marilyn was admitted to Radcliffe, one of the top seven woman's liberal arts colleges in the United States, and began her college life. At this time, it was also the second wave feminism in America, and society launched the theoretical discussion about every area of woman's experience including politics, work, the family and sexuality. They focused on the issue that how to define women and their values. Even though the social background has begun to emphasize female power and rights, male chauvinism was still deeply rooted in the people's minds, and female were not treated completely equally. Marilyn was determined to be a doctor since she was a child. When she chose chemistry and went to the laboratory, "She found herself the only girl in a room of fifteen men" (Ng, 2014, p. 26). Students and teachers agreed that girls are not suitable for chemistry and are incompetent to learn it well. The lecturer would contemptuously prompt her to "tie up those golden locks" (Ng, 2014, p. 26), and the classmates were always ready to help her, even if these things are extremely simple, "Can I light the burner for you?" "Let me open that jar for you" (Ng, 2014, p. 26). The female's own capacity, value evaluation and significance are completely underestimated and submerged in patriarchal society. In a deep sense, female are defined by male class, and male decide even dominate what female should be like.

The second step is to reverse the concept which is accepted by the general public. Under the secular concepts, men are stronger than women, and women are the dependency of the men. In this novel, Celeste Ng intended to subvert the conventional concepts and emphasized the capacity of women. Marilyn impressed everyone with her

outstanding ability. "Her results were the most accurate; her lab reports the most complete. By midterm, she set the curve for every exam, and the instructor had stopped smirking" (Ng, 2014, p. 26). Marilyn proved with her own strength and persistence that women are not worse than men and even can do better than them. She also made it clear that her future career would be totally different from that of most women represented by her mother. She didn't want to be trapped in a corner of the kitchen, "sewing a neat hem was a laudable accomplishment and removing beet strains from a blouse was cause for celebration." (Ng, 2014, p. 30). She wants to be a doctor, snatching bleeding and saving lives. Marilyn desired to break the shackles and restraints set for women in the patriarchal society with her own abilities and efforts. This forward-looking ideal is undoubtedly a great challenge to the male-dominated society.

The final step is to subvert the tradition of logocentrism. Due to the influence of marriage and pregnancy, Marilyn suspended her last year's study, and certainly, her dream of being a doctor had to be put on hold. After her mother died, Marilyn felt very depressed when she was sorting out her mother's belongings. So she drove blankly and turned into the parking lot of the hospital. When sitting in the corner of the waiting room, Marilyn noticed that all the doctors were male, and she even began to doubt her long-held ideal. "What had made her think she could be one of them? It seemed as impossible as turning into a tiger" (Ng, 2014, p. 95).

However, with the opening of the doors of emergency room, Marilyn was surprised to find that Woolf, the newly moved female neighbor, turned out to be a doctor. She is elegant, capable, confident and calm, and skilled in business. All nurses and doctors will respectfully call her "Dr. Woolf". There will even be male doctors asking her for cases and advice. Women are fully capable of standing or even being competent in the field of male. Since then, the binary opposition between male and female has been subverted and deconstructed in Ng's novel.

2.2 The Deconstruction Between Strong Culture and White Culture

An crucial thing that the whole novel intends to convey is condemning and opposing the racial discrimination and dispelling the white people's monobasic discourse hegemony. The pair of binary opposition was mainly demonstrated by James. The Chinese-American culture represented by James had a strong collision with the mainstream American white culture. In this cultural confrontation, James's sense of inferiority and evasion directly catalyzed the tragedy of Lydia and the whole family.

James is a Chinese born in America, and his father came to California to work and live under a false name. In order to prevent being found to be an impostor and then being repatriated, they have to try best to integrate into the crowd and avoid being different. James was wrapped in this kind of consciousness since he was a child. Therefore, he always felt inferior to his Chinese-American identity. When he was a teenager, he found himself the first Oriental student in Lloyd on the first day of school and his classmates were surprised by his eyes and studied where he came from. Since then, James has done his utmost to hide his Chinese-American identity and integrate into the crowd and American society through his own efforts. He drew up a "curriculum of studying American culture" for himself. During his seven years at Harvard, he also studied the most quintessentially American culture topic—Cowboys. Even the marriage with Marilyn was because "Hers had been just one of the pale, pretty faces, indistinguishable from the next..... this was the first reason he came to love her: because she had blended in so perfectly, because she had seemed so completely and utterly at home" (Ng, 2014, p. 37). James's condition can reflect the contradictory psychology of the majority of Chinese-American. On the one

hand, they can't understand their own national tradition, and go out of their way to integrate into the mainstream society, they inadvertently or intentionally alienate Chinese traditional culture. On the other hand, no matter how they abandon or even belittle Chinese culture, no matter how hard they try to integrate into the melting pot of America, they can't escape the fate of being discriminated against by mainstream society, and it is difficult to get a place in America, a paradise called "everyone is equal and everyone has the opportunity to realize their dreams". When he found that his daughter Lydia inherited her mother's blue eyes and possessed the most obvious characteristics of white people, he pinned all his expectations of integrating into American society on Lydia. He constantly encouraged and urged Lydia to make friends and told her to fit in. Even the Christmas gift given to her was a book named *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. "I thought you could use this. It's supposed to—well, help you win friends. Be popular" (Ng, 2014, p. 176). After learning that Lydia committed suicide and noticing the newspaper commented said that "Children of Mixed Background Often Struggle to Find Their Place" (Ng, 2014, p. 200). James's first reaction was also to feel guilty about the Chinese descent and identity he brought to Lydia. "You know what I mean, if she'd been a white girl ... if I'd been a white man, she would have fit in" (Ng, 2014, p. 203).

Behind these behaviors and psychology are James's extreme lack of confidence in Chinese culture and the overwhelming prevalence of American white culture. Although the United States claims to be a melting pot, the mainstream culture is full of disdain for ethnic minority cultures, and even influences the value orientation and evaluation of ethnic minority cultures with their authoritative strength. Ng also attempted to reverse the racial concept which was deeply rooted. After James quarreled with Marilyn, he went to the home of Chinese girl Louisa who was his lover. Louisa prepared a snack for him. After James's parents died, he never ate it again, but subconsciously he said their name loudly—Char siu bau. "He has not said a word in Chinese in forty years, but he is amazed at how his tongue still curls around their familiar shape" (Ng, 2014, p. 204). "Slowly he lifts up a bun from the box. It is lighter than he remembers, cloud-like, yielding beneath his fingertips. He had forgotten that anything could be so tender. He breaks the bun open, revealing glossy bit of pork and glaze, a secret red heart. When he puts it to his mouth, it is like a kiss: sweet and salty and warm" (Ng, 2014, p. 205). The nostalgic and homesick feeling was aroused in the soul of James. Something he tried to hide and evade was proved that can't be forgotten and changed. When he finished having sex with Louisa, his thoughts changed a little. He thought that "this is the sort of woman he should have fallen in love with. A woman who looked just like this. A woman just like him" (Ng, 2014, p. 205). James wanted to marry a white woman to prove that he succeeded in getting rid of Chinese identity and integrating into America. But at this time, he found that some things are indelible and unchangeable. Although Chinese culture cannot occupy the mainstream, at least it should not be hidden, ignored or even hated.

The third step is to subvert the hierarchy. Celeste Ng expressed her inner desire that cultures are equal by comparing James and Nath. Nath inherited his father's black eyes, which is the distinctive feature of Chinese-American hybrids. At school, Nath also suffered from social failure. When playing games in the swimming pool, no children responded to him. Because of his height limitation, he could not join the football team and basketball team. But unlike James, Nath didn't indulge in inferiority complex because of his Chinese characteristics, and didn't focus on making himself more American. Only two things are important in his life, Lydia and astronomy. He was not obstinate in gaining the recognition of his white companions and distributed his

energy only on what interested him. At this point, Nath jumped out of the shackles and blocks brought to him by ethnicity. The opposite fate of James and Nath were caused by the different attitudes toward the culture of the white people, which proved that following blindly the culture of white people could only put people in the condition of madness and confusion, and only by maintaining self-esteem and self-confidence can individuals and races develop and continue healthily.

2.3 The Deconstruction Between Parent and Children

What Ng wants to convey mainly in this novel, is the reversal of the traditional parent-child ethical relationship. When parents' excessive interference and over-expected love are imposed on children, the psychological demands of both sides are not satisfied to a certain extent. Lydia grew up under the suffocating love that she could not escape, and her brother Nath's company was her only consolation. When Nath was going to study at Harvard, her last salvation was taken away, and drowning herself was her last silent resistance.

Firstly, Celeste Ng identified the mighty hierarchy between parents and children. Lydia was the most favored child in the family and is the "reluctant center of their universe whole family" (Ng, 2014, p. 160). In James's view, Lydia inherited her mother's blue eyes which can help him realize his dream of integrating into American society. Meanwhile, Marilyn transplanted her expectation to Lydia after making it clear that her doctor's dream could not be realized. It can be said that Lydia is the carrier for parents to realize their private illusions. In the eyes of Nath and Hannah, "Lydia, so fussed over, so carefully tended, like a prize flower. They loved her" (Ng, 2014, p. 114). James would drive her to the shopping mall to meet her friends. At the dinner table, the family always cared about Lydia from her study to socializing. Even if Nath gets the acceptance letter from Harvard, Lydia's simple sentence "I'm failing physics" would easily attract the attention of their parents. "Everyone had forgotten about Harvard, about Nath's letter, about Nath himself" (Ng, 2014, p. 171). Hannah's degree of existence is even lower and she was almost invisible. "When Marilyn, laying four plates for dinner one night, did not realize her omission until Hannah reached the table" (Ng, 2014, p. 161). In the eyes of parents, only Lydia is the one they want to put all their energy and love into.

Secondly, Ng reversed the traditional ethical relationship between parents and children by revealing the true psychology and living conditions of Lydia. In the beginning of chapter two, Ng revealed the real reason of Lydia's tragedy:

How had it begun? Like everything: with mothers and fathers. Because of Lydia's mother and father, because of her mother's and father's mothers and fathers. Because long ago, her mother had gone missing, and her father had brought her home. Because more than anything, her mother had wanted to stand out; because more than anything, her father had wanted to blend in. Because those things had been impossible. (Ng, 2014, p. 25)

In order to integrate his daughter into the crowd and mainstream American culture, James's Christmas gift to Lydia is a book about interpersonal communication, and his birthday gift is a necklace. "I wanted gold, but a reliable source told me everyone was wearing silver this year" (Ng, 2014, p. 227). He likes to buy Lydia "dresses off mannequin" because "he was sure it meant everyone was wearing them" (Ng, 2014, p. 264). In Lydia's view, "her father was so concerned with what everyone was doing: I'm so glad you're going to the dance, honey-everyone goes to the dance. Your hair looks so pretty that way, Lyddie—everyone has long hair these days, right?" (Ng, 2014, p. 227). Her mother, Marilyn, wanted her daughter to inherit her doctor's dream and be

different from others. "Marilyn spun out Lydia's future in one long golden thread, the future she was positive her daughter wanted, too: Lydia in high heels and a white coat, a stethoscope round her neck; Lydia bent over an operating table, a ring of men awed at her deft handiwork" (Ng, 2014, p. 159). She planned everything for Lydia such as bought books, signed up for remedial classes, watched science exhibitions and listened to biology classes in universities in advance. Lydia worried that her mother would leave home and disappear as before. Therefore, she maintained the balance of her family carefully as if treading on thin ice and put all the pressure and burden on herself:

She has been afraid so long, she had forgotten what it was like not to be—afraid that, one day, her mother would disappear again, that her father would crumble, that their whole family would collapse once more.....Before that she hadn't realized how fragile happiness was, how if you were careless, you could knock it over and shatter it. Anything her mother wanted, she had promised. As long as she would stay. She had been so afraid. (Ng, 2014, p. 272)

But the fact was that Lydia was not as lively, cheerful and sociable as her parents expected. At school, Lydia sat alone in the canteen in silence. She would pretend to called her classmates and then put her ears on the receiver and listened to the low dial tone. James didn't realize Lydia never really had friends. Certainly, Lydia didn't study as well as her mother thought. She gradually couldn't keep pace with the content of the course. "Each test score had been lower than the last, reading like a strange weather forecast. Now there was the fifty-five" (Ng, 2014, p. 162). When the achievement that parents expect and the love they give with all their strength are not equal to or even conflict with the love that their children wish, one side's psychological defense line will inevitably collapse. Lydia would go for a drive and smoke and even want to have sex with Jack to relieve her stress in this bold and rebellious way. In the past ten years, parents' expectations have been increasing with Lydia's age, as well as Lydia's unspeakable pressure. When parents' self-righteous love is imposed on their children for the sake of "for your own good", the consequence will not be as they desire. As a self-conscious individual, children are not the carrier of parents' dreams. As the Chinese poet Hai Sang wrote in his poem, children are their own hopes rather than parents', and parents' unfilled dreams do not belong to children.

Finally, Lydia deconstructed the binary opposition with her suicide. When Lydia saw Hannah secretly take away the necklace she received for her birthday, she seemed to hear James's voice instantly, "Being sociable. Being popular. Blending in. You don't feel like smiling? Then what? Force yourself to smile. Don't criticize, condemn, or complain" (Ng, 2014, p. 260). The next moment, Lydia pulled off the necklace around Hannah's neck, and she told Hannah, "You don't want that" (Ng, 2014, p. 260). "Don't ever smile if you don't want to." (Ng, 2014, p. 261). Lydia intended to help Hannah break the shackles in which she was trapped and couldn't escape. When Lydia realized that Nath went to Harvard for a visit and refused to answer Lydia's phone call, her mother Marilyn's academic requirements became more and more urgent, her father had an affair with Louisa and Jack loved her brother instead of her, Lydia's psychological defense completely collapsed. "She went to the dock, went down into the boat, loosed the rope, rowed awkwardly and drifted away. She looked down at the lake, which in the dark looked like nothing, just blackness, a great void spreading beneath her. It will be alright, she told herself, and she stepped out of the boat into the water" (Ng, 2014, p. 276). At this time, Lydia's life was freeze-framed here and now. She vented her dissatisfaction of the traditional ethical relationship between parents and children at the highest cost—life and freed herself from oppression and burden. Celeste Ng also reminded readers through this ending that a child is an independent individual, not a plasticine that can be kneaded and

shaped into any shape by parents randomly. With Lydia's suicide, the binary opposition between parents and children has been deconstructed. Just like the beginning of this novel "The goal of our whole lives are to get rid of the expectations of others and find ourselves."

III. Conclusion

As a Chinese American woman writer, Celeste Ng's novels focus on the Chinese ethnicity and traditional ethical relationships. In *Everything I Never Told You*, Ng reveals the psychological trauma caused by the complex ethical dilemma faced by cross-ethnic families and the collision between strong cultures and weak cultures through Lydia's tragedy. This novel challenged and questioned the superiority of race and culture of the white race which was endowed by logocentrism and the overwhelming oppression of parents toward children. The deconstruction tendencies conveyed by Celeste Ng by analyzing three groups of binary oppositions, which provide the possibility of rebuilding the identity and culture of Chinese-American and reshaping the healthy parent-child ethical relationship.

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