

A Study of *Everything I Never Told You* from New Historicism

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Abstract: *Everything I Never Told You*, a debut novel of Chinese American novelist Celeste Ng, portrays the chaotic relationships of the Lee family. It is a tragic story beyond the author's personal identity and race. As a new literary theory appeared in the early 1980s, New Historicism pays close attention to the relationship between historical context and literary production, examines the mutual molding process of history and literature. For new historicists, literary texts are as important as non-literary texts. New Historicism is also devoted to studying the historical and cultural context, as well as latter's influence on the course of history. Employing the theory of New Historicism, this paper tries to analyze the interactive relationship between history and text, and get a thorough understanding of this novel.

Keywords: Celeste Ng; *Everything I Never Told You*; New Historicism; Historicity of Text; Textuality of History.

I. INTRODUCTION

The novel *Everything I Never Told You* written by Celeste Ng is New York Times bestseller, a New York Times Notable Book of 2014, Amazon's No.1 Best Book of 2014. Focusing on family, love, ambition, as well as death, this exquisite novel is about Chinese-American family living in 1970s small-town Ohio. The story begins with the Lees are horrified with their daughter Lydia's death. As the police investigate what causes Lydia's death, her parents discover that she is actually a loner with almost no friends and her performance in subjects is not better. When Lydia's body is found in the lake, the delicate balancing act that has been keeping the Lee family together is destroyed, tumbling them all into chaos. Lydia's death forces the whole family to confront the long-kept secrets that have been pulling them apart, and to reflect back on their lives. As a popular novel, *Everything I Never Told You* has been analyzed with various literal criticism, yet few touched the novel with New Historicism.

As a new kind of cultural theory and literary critical method in the field of Renaissance research, New Historicism arose in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The term "New Historicism" was used by Michael McCannles in 1980 in reference to Renaissance culture, but its current implication is believed to have started with Stephen Greenblatt in 1982 when he remarked in a special issue of *Genre* that "New Historicism erodes the firm ground of both criticism and literature." [1] New Historicism, as Louis Montrose put it, lies "in its refusal of unproblematized distinctions between 'literature' and 'history', between 'text' and 'context'; new in resisting a prevalent tendency to posit and privilege a unified and autonomous individual—whether an Author or a Work—to be set against a social or literary background." [2] The relationship between history and texts or between historicity and textuality remains the center of the New Historicism arguments. Even though their inclination toward historicity and textuality vary in the extent, yet no new historicist excludes historicity or textuality in their study of literary and non-literary texts. In a word, all new historicists believe that there are elements of historicity in literary texts, and accordingly, there are elements of textuality in history.

II. HISTORICITY OF TEXT IN *EVERYTHING I NEVER TOLD YOU*

A. Historical Influences on *Everything I Never Told You*

With a special identity as a Chinese American writer, Celeste Ng cannot escape the influence of various movements occurring in 1950s-70s in America, including Civil Right Movements, Anti-Vietnam War Movement, and Feminist Movement. In *Everything I Never Told You*, Marilyn's dream of becoming a doctor and Dr. Wolff's career show some hints of Feminism in that period. Therefore, it is better for us to explore the development of Feminist Movement and its declarations.

The term Feminism can be used to describe a political, cultural or economic movement aiming at establishing equal rights and legal protection for women. Feminism involves political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference, as well as a movement that advocates gender equality for women and campaigns for women's rights and interests. Actually, the Feminism movement's history has been divided into three "waves". The first wave refers mainly to women's suffrage movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth century (mainly concerned with women's right to vote). The second wave refers to the ideas and actions associated with the women's liberation movement beginning in the 1960s (which campaigned for legal and social rights for women). The third wave refers to a continuation of, and a reaction to the perceived failures of, second-wave feminism, beginning in the 1990s. *Everything I Never Told You* is set in late 1970's Ohio. In 1960, women in America were limited in almost every aspect, from family life to career path. A woman was supposed to marry in her early twenties, start a family quickly and raise children, and then devote her whole life to homemaking. In the family, wives took the responsibility for all housekeeping and looking after children, and spent most of their time on domestic chores. In 1960s, there weren't many options open to women, and women were generally unwelcome in professional programs mainly dominated by men, and women were routinely underpaid at the market rate and got less opportunities to advance and obtain the role of leadership. After World War II, the boom of the American economy outpaced the available workforce, making it necessary for women to fill new job openings. Meanwhile, as expectations for a comfortable middle-class lifestyle rose, "having two incomes became critical to achieving this lifestyle, making women's participation in the workforce still more acceptable." [3]

Ng pointed out that the feeling of negotiating between American culture and Asian one is something which she got from life and rooted to the main characters of *Everything I Never Told You*. Ng's inspiration for her debut novel is a story her husband told her about his schoolmate who pushed his little sister into a pond in the backyard. Fortunately, this girl was saved by her parents. For some mysterious reasons, the image of the little girl falling into the water stuck with Ng. As she started to write this story, Ng was eager to figure out how the falling girl got there and realized that it was a story not just about the girl but about her whole family, her family's background, and everything in her life that led her to this point, and about how her family would be able to go on after her death. Her husband's small seed turned out to be the center of the novel.

In *Everything I Never Told You*, James is a first-generation Chinese American. Ng is also a first-generation American, whose parents emigrated from Hong Kong and moved straight into the Midwest: Illinois, Indianan, Pennsylvania, Ohio. James is the only Asian in the place that he lives in and has always felt like that he is an outsider throughout going to this boarding school. Although he has tried to blend in, James fails. Likewise, Ng was growing up most of the time, with her family members essentially the only Asians in the community, just like most Asian Americans, her family experienced straight discrimination.

At its heart, the novel is about family, mysterious loss, grief, interracial marriage, unsaid secrets and belonging. The husband is James, a Chinese American history professor at an Ohio college and the wife is Marilyn, a Yankee-American medical school dropout. For Ng, writing about a biracial family seems more significant. Ng has thought a lot about what his life would be like and whether he would relate, or not, to his two cultures. Ng is in an interracial marriage, so she has a lot of first-hand experiences to draw on. In real life, there are moments of friction and disagreement where she notices the different backgrounds between her and her husband has made them into people with distinct views.

B. The Function of *Everything I Never Told You* in Society and History

To New Historicism, the text is the reflection of the social and historical development, and the literary text also functions as significant factors in shaping society and history. The relationship between history and literary texts should be taken as reciprocal. Greenblatt assumes that readers are an important component of building historical reality beyond the boundaries of literary texts and real lives. *Everything I Never Told You* is able to participate in the formation process of history and also has its role in the development of society and history.

What comes first is the marriage relationship between a man and a woman, especially, those are not from the same ethnicity. In the novel, as a Chinese American, James has never quite felt he belongs anywhere; even though he becomes one of the first Asians to lecture in U.S. History at Harvard later, his students regard him as an exotic interloper. As a white American woman, Marilyn is estranged from her cold and distant mother, who is a home economics teacher and prays at the feet of Betty Crocker. She wants to stand above the crowd, to be that much more different than everyone else, that much better. Tragedy is the underlying emotion of their marriage. Their marriage would be against the law in some states. In 1958, interracial relationships are taboo. Marilyn's mother doesn't approve of her daughter's marriage. "You're sure," she asks after meeting James for the first time, "that he doesn't just want a green card?" [4]

Although a marriage between a white woman and an Asian man in the 1950s was unusual, Marilyn and James ignore the protests of family and plan a bright future. James has been scarred by his experiences of growing up and in college; Marilyn feels her medical goals and other ambitious life plans are derailed by marriage and an early pregnancy. But they love each other and are determined to make their unconventional marriage work. Ng writes, “When they had married, he and Marilyn had agreed to forget about the past. They would start a new life together, the two of them, with no looking back.” [4] When the death of their daughter puts pressure on their marriage, racial and cultural fissures appear. The problem in their marriage truly comes from their pretending that there are no any cultural differences between them. They decide to try to overlook the ways that people around them. They can’t even admit their cultural differences, or the pain those reactions cause. In an interview, Ng points out cultural issues don’t have to be a barrier, but you can’t pretend they’re not there. In the novel, Ng writes, “In the blur of her fury, Marilyn doesn’t think twice about what she’s said. To James, though, the word rifles from his wife’s mouth and lodges deep in his chest. From those two syllables—kowtow—explode bent-backed coolies in cone hats, pigtailed Chinamen with sandwiched palms. Squinty and servile. Bowing and belittled. He has long suspected that everyone sees him this way... But he had not thought that everyone included Marilyn.”[4] This is the deadly consequence of ignoring their cultural differences in a marriage.

America has traditionally been referred to as a “melting pot,” welcoming people from many different countries, races, and religions, all hoping to find freedom, new opportunities, and a better way of life. In America, there are a great number of multiracial marriages. Those people can see themselves and their experiences reflected in this literary text. And then it may persuade them to bravely stand up and fight for their own rights for respect, identity, and cultures. That is to say, *Everything I Never Told You* has a positive function in shaping people in the course of history.

When it comes to parenting, we have to mention the roles of parents in the course of their children’s growth. This novel particularly explores the effects of well-intentioned but flawed parents. The result is an absorbing and heartbreaking family drama. In fact, few will argue with the premise that it is one of the key roles of parents to guide their children to a good life, and if at all possible, a better life than that of the parents. But how exactly should one accomplish this worthy goal? Does it require the child to obtain a college education, participate in the family’s faith tradition, engage in community service, get part-time job during high school? Parents’ psychological manners and life expectations will make tremendous impacts on their children.

This novel unfolds with a disappearance of Lydia who is the favorite child of James and Marilyn. The parents are determined that Lydia will fulfill the dreams they are unable to pursue. In the novel, Ng writes, “Marilyn would not be like her own mother, shunting her daughter toward husband and house, a life spent safely behind a deadbolt. She would help Lydia do everything she was capable of. She would spend the rest of her years guiding Lydia, sheltering her, the way you tended a prize rose: helping it grow, propping it with stakes, arching each stem toward perfection.”[4]

However, neither Marilyn nor James is concerned about what Lydia wants to do and what kind of life she wants to lead as a high school student and beyond. “And Lydia herself—the reluctant center of their universe—every day, she held the world together. She absorbed her parents’ dreams, quieting the reluctance that bubbled up within.”[4] Actually, Marilyn is slowly killing her daughter with impossibly high expectations. “All her life she had heard her mother’s heart drumming one beat: doctor, doctor, doctor,” Ng writes of Lydia, “She wanted this so much, Lydia knew, that she no longer needed to say it.”[4] In her last encounter with her doomed daughter, Marilyn means to say, “I love you,” but instead urges Lydia to study harder: “Don’t let your life slip away from you.”[4] To add a sense of urgency, Marilyn continues to say when she is dead, that’s all she wants her daughter to remember. Her mother’s words suck the breath from Lydia’s lungs. Ng brilliantly depicts the destruction that parents can inflict on their oldest girl.

Hannah, the Lees’ youngest child, gets overlooked by everyone—not because of how she looks, but because she is the youngest and her parents’ loyalty has already been staked out. She follows the older members of her family, seeing all but remaining invisible. She seems like an afterthought in the family. However, her quiet powers of observation allow her to play a key role in helping the Lees figure out what happened to Lydia.

The relationship between parents and siblings in the Lees is devastating. Just like a tragedy, the novel functions as a way for you to release and provide relief from repressed emotions. Readers can learn a lot about parenting and getting along with family members from the novel. As a parent, it is almost impossible not to have some idea or wishes about what his or her child is going to be like. As a child, he has a sense of his parents’ expectations, what they want or don’t want. All in all, *Everything I Never Told You* is a rich work with profound meanings, from which we can learn not only techniques of

tacking marriage relationship, but also reflections of parent-children relationships which are enlightening to people at present. We learn that imposing a life to children can be deadly. We should respect our closest family.

C. *Everything I Never Told You* as one of histories

As mentioned above, the relationship between history and literary texts remains in the center of New Historicist arguments. New Historicists assume that history and texts are intertwined with each other and history is subjectively narrated by historians. Historians' historical writing has just resulted in unauthentic history, the interpreted version of authentic history. In his work *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Karl Popper writes, "there can no history of 'the past as it actually did happen'; there can only be historical interpretations, and none of them final; and every generation has a right to frame its own." [5] According to the concept of historicity of text, history and literary texts belong to the same symbolic system. They deem that History is an extended text, and text is a condensed history. Therefore, New Historicists are responsible for depicting those condensed cases in "histories" and further removing their political bias in "History". So the history we learn from official documents and textbooks will be possibly different from the history we learn from *Everything I Never Told You*.

Actually, as a literary text, the novel can't embody the whole authentic history of interracial families, especially Asian Americans, in America. Many various kinds of texts are required to study in order to drive interracial families' living situations to the readers. Historical texts are just a certain version of the interpretation of what occurred in the past, rather than the truth or objective knowledge. *Everything I Never Told You* is based on the history, because that biracial relationships are unacceptable in 1950s in America is true. But it is also beyond the history, Ng also adds her imaginative elements into it. It is about racial barriers, American family, ambition, the basic human thirst for belonging and love between parents and their progeny. It is based on the history of the marriage between Asians and Americans several decades ago, which was illegal in several states. The novel paints a portrait of the U.S. in 1977. Their tragic lives mirror the true living conditions of marginalized people in America, which is never recorded in "History". Nonetheless, those history documents which are compiled by the dominant up-classes highlight the chaos, diseases, and confusion caused by these people. No historical documents are used to record significant contribution made by Asian Americans. Moreover, the readers can also obtain more information about the life and growth of biracial children. In order to know history deeply, we need to examine texts as many as possible, concerning various aspects. What people get to know from *Everything I Never Told You* is not exactly the same as the true history, because Ng interprets her aesthetic and ideological philosophy into the text.

III. TEXTUALITY OF HISTORY IN EVERYTHING I NEVER TOLD YOU

A. Historical Events Recorded in *Everything I Never Told You*

On May 6, 1882, Chinese Exclusion Act was passed by the Congress and signed into law by President Chester A. Arthur. Chinese Exclusion Act demanded the non-laborers who wanted entry to obtain certification from the Chinese government showing that they were qualified to immigrate. Nonetheless, these people found it increasingly difficult to prove that they were qualified immigrants. Thus few Chinese could go to U.S. under the 1882 law.

The 1882 act also put new requirements on Chinese who had already entered the country. If they left the United States, they had to regain certified statements to enter again. Congress, moreover, refused State and Federal courts the right to give citizenship to Chinese resident aliens, although these courts could still deport them. However, the American government was not content with the effects of Chinese Exclusion Act. In order to further prohibit more Chinese people into U.S. and repatriate Chinese immigrants inside, several amendments and new laws were promulgated, including the Geary Act in 1892, the Anti-Miscegenation Law in 1906, and the National Origins Act in 1924..

Nonetheless, because of the enforcement of the Chinese Exclusion Acts from 1882 to 1943, many Chinese immigrants arrived in the United States by purchasing fraudulent documents identifying their citizenship. Those who took this method to gain entry into America were called as "paper sons". In addition to the Chinese Exclusion Act, another historical event that caused more "paper son" documents to be produced was the earthquake of 1906 in San Francisco. The fire the San Francisco earthquake caused destroyed public birth documents. Chinese immigrants exiting in America took this opportunity to claim that they were born in the United States and apply for citizenship. There were no any written certificates to contradict those people; so many Chinese people became Americans legally by this method. In addition, as United States citizens, some Chinese men traveled back to China and then arrived in America to claim that their wives had

kids while in China. Consequently, these children would gain a document to prove that they were United States citizens. These certificates were also sold to strangers, neighbors, friends, and relatives. In *Everything I Never Told You*, James's father had come to California "under a false name, pretending to be the son of a neighbor who had emigrated there some years earlier".[4] During the period of the enforcement of Chinese Exclusion Acts, this was the story of every Chinese immigrant from the time of Chester A. Arthur to the end of the Second World War.

In June, 1958, two residents of Virginia, 17-year-old Mildred Jeter, a Negro woman, and her sweetheart Richard Loving, 23-year-old white construction worker, got married in the District of Columbia in accordance with its laws. Shortly after their marriage in Washington, the Lovings returned to Virginia and established their marital apartment in Caroline of Country. Soon, the Lovings were issued with violating Virginia's "miscegenation" law banning marriage between whites and non-whites. Although they had a marriage certificate, the local police arrested them. The couple was charged with illegal cohabitation and sentenced to one year in prison. However, in the case, Leon M. Bazile, the trial judge, made the sentence to be suspended on the condition that the couple leave the State and not return to Virginia together for the next 25 years. Bazile stated in an interview that, "Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, malay and red, and he placed them on separate continents. And, but for the interference with his arrangement, there would be no cause for such marriage. The fact that he separated the races shows that he did not intend for the races to mix." [6] On January 6, 1959, the couple pleaded guilty and then moved to the District of Columbia. Later, they appealed their conviction on the conditions that Virginia Law violated their rights to equal protection of the law which was repugnant to the Fourteenth Amendment. Mildred Loving was miserable in Washington. She took a cousin's advice and wrote to Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy for help. Several months later, the Supreme Court declared Virginia's miscegenation law unconstitutional. The Court held that there could be no doubt that restricting the freedom to marry because of racial classifications violates the fundamental meaning of the Equal Protection Clause. One of the three judges thought that marriage is one of "the basic civil rights".

Fortunately, the Supreme Court ruling emphasized the stupidity and unfairness of Virginia's segregation law. And the case uncovered the secret history of race in the southern part of America. However, for the Lovings, this struggle was meant to change the world. It was just their fight for the civil right to get married with one another and then to return to the community where they lived. Indeed, the case goes far beyond the black-white marriage relationship that started more than fifty years ago. In some ways, the Supreme Court adjudication represented the victory of love over hatred. When *Loving v Virginia* was decided, it indicated for all that interracial marriage was legal. It spurred a growing approval of interracial marriage among both non-whites and whites in the society.

B. Interpretation of Historical Events Recorded in *Everything I Never Told You*

Through alluding to the death of Lydia in the novel, Ng explores several grievous themes, including racial discrimination, sexism, and protesting against interracial marriage.

Both writers and their literary texts intend to uncover the real history of marginalized and inferior groups and fight against the dominant authority and superior classes. The history of Chinese migration to the United States can be traced back to the middle of 19th century because of political turmoil and poverty at home. Most of Chinese immigrants were single and first took some low-skilled jobs as miner, restaurant waiters, factory workers, agricultural laborers, railroad construction crew and so on. Meanwhile they were discriminated against and despised by the natives and other races. As an Asian American, in the novel, Ng feels urgent to describe the past lives of Chinese Americans and present the readers what they suffered from.

In *Everything I Never Told You*, Ng narrates a dysfunctional family paralyzed by secrets. There are James father, Marilyn mother, and Lydia and her siblings, Nath and Hannah. They all have their own struggles and secrets; however, they cannot share with each other. They never say to each other what they most need. In the following section, the discrimination the Lee family experienced will be discussed. James and his children are discriminated mainly because of their race; Marilyn because of gender.

James is born on American soil, but he feels he doesn't belong there. His father moved to California from China "under a false name, pretending to be a son of a neighbor who had emigrated there some years earlier".[4] At his age of six, James went to a small boarding school in Iowa with his parents, who would work there and do maintenance. The reason why his parents decide to sell their furniture and move across the country with two suitcases is a special policy for kids of

employees. If an employee's kid could pass an entrance examination, he or she could attend the school for free. The entrance exam, which is too much for a six-year-old child, is a barrier to prevent uneducated children from studying at school. However, James's performance surprises all of them and passes the exam.

From the depiction of James in the novel, we can know that he has always suffered from various forms of discrimination in his lifetime. He should have mastered the techniques to endure internal conflict and embarrassment because of the unfair and cruel treatments he gets from other people all his life. In order to avoid suffering the same pain and humiliation for his children, James encourages them to take part in parties, go to films with their friends, and attend social gatherings. He even sends Lydia a classic book *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie, as a birthday gift, about how to be popular among people. It is ironic. Overall, for James, he believes that conformity is the key factor to success and disconformity is not a good thing for them.

According to the local paper, Nath and his siblings, Lydia and Hannah, are the only orientals in their school. Just like their father, they live a very isolating life as the only Chinese in the community. In the novel, through Ng's description of their childhood and the recollection of Lydia's social life during the process of murder investigation, they encounter daily micro-aggression directly or indirectly. One time, James drives Nath to learn breaststroke. When they get there, there is no space for breaststroke lessons, because several elderly men glide in laps. So James suggests Nath "go in and play with the others until the pool emptied out".[4] In the course of playing "Marco Polo", a ten-year-old girl shouts to Nath, "Chink can't find China". Chink is a disparaging term used for a Chinese person. In Middlewood's kindergarten class, Lydia is asked directly by her classmate that "Do Chinese people celebrate Thanksgiving Day" and "Do Chinese people have belly buttons?"[4] Ng touches on discrimination in a few different ways, which makes this story stand out from a typical family drama novel.

In her first novel, Ng writes about an interracial relationship between an Asian man and an American woman. The novel's distinctive difference is that it is concerning a Chinese American family in the 1970s in Ohio. It captures the intolerance and small-town way of thinking prevalent during that period. Interracial marriage is not always accepted by people. The combination of Loving and Jeter declares that there is a long way to change the outlooks of people. Interracial marriage has a huge impact on the mental and physical development of people concerned.

In the novel, it is learned that Marilyn becomes estranged from her mother mainly because of her rejection of her mother's life philosophy and her interracial marriage. In the family, a marriage of a white and a non-white has become more common at present in the U.S.; however, in the 1950s, Marilyn, a white, and James, a Chinese American, got married, it would have been very striking and unusual in Ohio. Both of them are strikingly different with their own distinctive characters and cultural heritage. The differences are even beyond their racial attributes.

For James, he always thinks he doesn't belong to the community and feels kind of misplaced. In his fifth grade, James stops speaking Chinese to his parents, afraid of tinting his English with an accent. Before that, he even has stopped speaking to his parent at school at all, afraid of his classmates finding that his parents are worker at school. When he attends Harvard University, James chooses "the most quintessentially American subject he could find—cowboys" [4] in order to prove that he is a real American. For Marilyn, she always wants to be different from her mother. She keeps away from the goals her mother sets up for her to be a housewife. Instead she decides to gain her medical certificate at Harvard. After her father leaves them, Marilyn and her mother live together. And her mother starts to teach home economics. For the purpose of protesting about her refused requirement of taking shop instead of home economics, Marilyn begins "tangling the thread on her sewing machine", "snipping patterns without unfolding them when making paper-cut lace of the layers beneath", "stirring eggshell fragments into the pancake batter", "switching salt and sugar in the sponge cake", "leaving her iron facedown on the board, causing not only a blackened burn in the cover but enough smoke to set off the fire sprinklers".[4] Both James and Marilyn start a long journey to be different from parents. However, it is very hard for them to find their own identities and realize their values in that period. Just like what Ng writes in the novel is that "because more than anything, (Lydia's) her mother had wanted to stand out; because more than anything, her father had wanted to blend in. Because those things had been impossible." [4]

Marilyn's marriage with an Asian American doesn't get her mother's approval, because James is not a white American. Even in Boston, Marilyn sometimes can find disapproval in the eyes of the passersby. When bent toward James's bit black hair, her white blond hair always attracts attention from people in theaters, on a park bench, in the market. On the wedding day, Marilyn's mother pulls her aside and subtly expresses her suspicion and doubts about the suitability of her interracial

marriage. Her mother complains a lot: Marilyn's dress isn't white, why Marilyn wouldn't get married in a church, it is so gray in June, daisies aren't a wedding flower, why Marilyn is in such a hurry, why Marilyn wouldn't wait, and so on. At last, her mother tells her that she will change her mind and regret later. After the wedding, Marilyn doesn't meet her mother until her mother dies.

In addition to the disapproval of Marilyn's mother in their interracial marriage, Marilyn and James have different opinions about the reason of Lydia's death and suffer from their interracial marriage. When Lydia's body is found at the bottom of the local lake, the balance in the Lee family is completely destroyed. Soon after the confirmation of Lydia's death, two police officers arrive at the Lees' home and ask a lot of uncomfortable questions about Lydia's school performance, her friends and emotions, and so on. More mysteriously, her parents and siblings find it unable to give honest and direct answers to those questions. After the officers get out, Marilyn hysterically accuses James of kowtowing and not expressing his own anger and frustrations. Filled with guilt in his mind, James drives to school every day and seeks calmness and comfort from his young pretty graduate assistant, Louisa Chen, who is also an Asian American. James just wonders if he should have married someone like Louisa Chen, sensible and Chinese. Finally in the later chapters in the novel, James starts to see his family problem as the small town does: whether a white woman and a Chinese man should marry. In contrary, consumed with doubts and confusion, Marilyn isolates herself in Lydia's room, seeks any clues to her death, and is determined to find out who is responsible for her favorite daughter's death. Nath just puts all his anger at his neighbor boy, Jack. And the youngest child, Hannah observes the family quietly and says nothing. Hannah may be the only person in the family who knows what really happened for Lydia. Because of Lydia's death, there are more fights and quarrels in the family. Marilyn's every word in the fight makes James angry. James believes that Marilyn now regrets marrying him and blames their multiracial marriage for Lydia's death.

Another deadly effect of interracial marriage in the Lee family is that they are isolated in the local community. At Lydia's funeral, lots of Lydia's classmates come. When looking at them, James and Marilyn just realize how long it has been since they've seen these girls: years. For Nath's classmates, James finds he is vaguely familiar with but doesn't really know them. Like Lydia, James and Marilyn don't have real friends, even the neighbors seem like strangers. In the novel, Ng writes, James and Marilyn have no dinner parties, no bridge group, no hunting buddies or luncheon pals. The reason why those strangers come to the funeral is that they are drawn by the spectacle of sudden death, especially the death of an oriental girl.

IV. CONCLUSION

Viewed from New Historicism, *Everything I Never Told You* becomes not only the mirror of history, but also serves as an important constituting part in history-making. By employing "historicity of text", we experience once again the bitterness and hardship suffered by the Asian Americans in a white-dominated society: loss of identity, isolation and discrimination. The prevalent discrimination in the society deprives Chinese American of conformity and then civil right equality. Unable to blend in the local community, the Chinese Americans are reduced to the state of confusion and then the mixed family begins to fall apart. As for the other dictum of New Historicism—"textuality of history", it tends to take literary works into a larger historical and social context, or discuss the novel intertextually with other pre-texts. An intertextual analysis of literary works will help us get a thoroughly understanding of the works itself and the society at the same time. Besides, these literary works can play an important role in histories-making, especially for those trapped in marginal areas or suppressed by the majorities.

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