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论文题目

Celeste Ng's Literature World

**—A Study of Space Imagery in *Everything I Never Told You*
and *Little Fires Everywhere***

伍绮诗的文学世界

—《无声告白》和《小小小小的火》的空间意象研究

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姓 名： 李慧娜

指导教师： 宋敏 教授

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Celeste Ng's Literature World
—A Study of Space Imagery in *Everything I Never Told You*
and *Little Fires Everywhere*

By

Li Huina

Under the Supervision of

Professor Song Min

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Name: Li Huina

Date: 2019.6.4

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ABSTRACT

Celeste Ng's Literature World
—A Study of Space Imagery in *Everything I Never Told You*
and *Little Fires Everywhere*

Li Huina

Celeste Ng, whose Chinese name is Wu Qishi, is a female Chinese-American writer. Her debut *Everything I Never Told You* and second novel *Little Fires Everywhere* have attracted much attention since their publication. Her two novels include multiple themes, such as female living condition, ethnic identity as well as a lack of communication, which offers possibility for probing into her works from many lights and perspectives.

Space imagery that projects subjective emotion, and carries different world values and writer's personal attitudes recur frequently in the works and present “the past” and “the present”, “there” and “here” in front of readers, which breaks time series, and more importantly stresses the effect of space. In reality, space imagery is a typical technique of spatial narrative and often applied to plot development, characterization and created literature world by many contemporary writers.

The thesis mainly analyzes space imagery in *Everything I Never Told You* and *Little Fires Everywhere*, with a view to studying Celeste Ng's unique literature world. Macroscopic space imagery attaches importance to communication and significance to “little fires” standing for freedom, dreams and justice in every person's heart. Microscopic space imagery consisting of road, house, kitchen, school along with corner also loads diverse connotations. Road can be a window of being watched. In addition, it can transform the destiny of characters. House and kitchen show different individual states, free or trapped, rebellious or compliant. School displays representation of power relation. Corner demonstrates the yearning and appeal of the disadvantaged group like homosexual persons.

Macroscopic space imagery and microscopic space imagery carry some certain connotations, be involved in narrative process as well as characterization, and propel plot development, through which Celeste Ng creates her unique literature world. In her literature world, Celeste Ng shows her concern for female living condition. They are constantly in a dilemma between an independent professional woman and a responsible housewife. Besides, Celeste Ng appeals to respect and understanding of the public to homosexual group, more vitally, a better communication between each other. Meanwhile Ng also criticizes severely racial prejudice in American world.

Keywords: Wu Qishi; *Everything I Never Told You*; *Little Fires Everywhere*;
space imagery; literature world

摘要

伍绮诗，是一位当代华裔女作家。她的处女作《无声告白》和第二部小说《小小小小的火》一经出版便受到很大关注。这两部作品蕴含多重主题，包括现代女性生存困境，族裔身份认同和沟通的缺失，这都赋予了小说多视野，多角度研读的可能性。

空间意象投射了作者的主观情感，与众不同的价值体系以及对物的个人态度。它在文本中的反复出现，同时呈现给读者“过去”与“现在”，“彼在”与“此在”，打破了时间序列，突出了空间效果。事实上，空间意象作为一种典型的空间叙事技巧，常被当代作家应用去发展情节，刻画人物以及创作独特的文学世界。

本论文主要通过分析《无声告白》和《小小小小的火》中具有共同之处的空间意象，旨在研究伍绮诗独特的文学世界。两部小说中的宏观空间意象分别强调了人与人之间沟通的重要性，以及每个人心中代表自由，梦想和正义的“小小小小的火”存在的重要性。微观空间意象由五部分组成，分别为道路空间意象，房屋空间意象，厨房空间意象，学校和角落空间意象。这些微观空间意象含有不同的内涵意义。道路空间意象可以作为被凝视的窗口，而且它还可以改变人物的命运。房屋和厨房空间意象揭示了人物不同的个体状态，自由或者被困，反抗或者顺从。学校空间意象代表了种族偏见的缩影，而且表露了各人物之间权利关系的表征。角落空间意象揭露了同性恋和非白种群体对被公平对待的渴望，并且呼吁了公众对他们的理解和尊重。

宏观空间意象和微观空间意象被赋予了某些特定的内涵，参与了小说叙事进程，推动了故事情节的发展，借此，伍绮诗创立了自己独特的文学世界。在她的文学世界中，伍绮诗表达了她对女性生存状况的关心，这些现代女性总是处于职业女性和家庭主妇的“夹层”状态，进而不得，出而不能。同时，伍绮诗呼吁了大众对同性恋的理解和尊重，强调了人与人之间的沟通和交流的重要性，最后她也强烈谴责了美国社会的种族偏见和种族歧视。

关键字：伍绮诗；《无声告白》；《小小小小的火》；空间意象；文学世界

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Celeste Ng and Her Two Works

Celeste Ng (1981-), whose Chinese name is Wu Qishi, is a rising star of the contemporary Chinese-American writers. She grows up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in a distinguished academic family. Her parents moved from Hong Kong, China in the 1960s. Her father is a physicist at NASA and her mother is a chemist who teaches at Cleveland State University. When Celeste Ng was ten, her family moved to Shaker Heights, which is the just spot the novel *Little Fires Everywhere* is set in. In 1998, when Celeste Ng graduated from Shaker Heights High School, she went to study English Literature at Harvard. Four years later, she attended graduate school at University of Michigan where she earned her Master Degree of Arts in creative writing. It was during the university that she released many short stories, such as *What Passes Over*, *Girls*, *At Play*, which helps her win some awards. Now she is the recipient of the Pushcart Prize and lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, along with her husband and son.

Being a first generation American, Celeste Ng is often told by her parents to represent her race, just as what she said in an interview: “they [her parents] were very aware of the fact that we were different and that people would make assumptions about our entire nationality or our entire ethnic group based on what I did” (interview, June 28, 2014). She has to behave herself in school because otherwise people may think badly of Chinese people. And she is supposed to be friendly to other people

because otherwise people will also think Chinese people are impolite. It seems to be silly. However, it is how stereotypes come into existence.

As a matter of fact, Celeste Ng is not a typical Chinese people besides Chinese heritage, her oriental appearance. She is imbued with western cultures, on account of her growing up in American World and accepting western values. So as she said in an interview she was unlike the typical Chinese-American writers, such as Maxine Hong Kingston and Amy Tan, who write their works from the aspect of Chinese-Americans (Huang 95). As for Celeste Ng, her works are first of all based on universal themes like understanding and love in spite of including racial discrimination as well at times.

Everything I Never Told You is her debut novel, which takes her six years to finish. Since the novel was published on June 26th, 2014 by Penguin Press, it has won many awards as well as praise from the public, media and critics. The novel tells a tragedy happening in a biracial family in the 1970s, which starts with a tear jerking, suspenseful sentence “Lydia is dead. But they don’t know yet” (Ng, “Everything” 1). There are five members in the Chinese-American family. Father James is a descendant of Chinese immigrants, whose father came to California under a false name, pretending to be the son of a neighbor who had emigrated there some years earlier. James never felt he belonged there even if he was born on American soil, graduated from Harvard and worked as a tenured professor. Being different in appearance besets him a great deal, labeling him “heterogeneity”. So it is very significant for him to mix up into the American World.

Mother Marilyn, a blonde-haired, blue-eyed wife, is a native. She wants to break free from the traditional matronly role that patriarchal society expects of her. She pursues “being different” and therefore she falls in love with different James. Her dream to be a woman doctor is finally shattered on account of the fetters of family and motherhood, resulting in her being a typical housewife, who rests her dream to be a doctor on her second daughter, Lydia.

The second daughter Lydia, a pearl in the palm of her parents and the reluctant center of her family, holds the world together. She absorbs her parents’ dreams,

quieting the reluctance that bubbles up within, which is the root cause of Lydia's death. Though the first boy Nath and the last girl Hannah are ignored by their parents, Nath is better at self-adjustment in the apparently balanced family. Consequently he is the luckiest person, losing himself in space and universe. With his interest and efforts, he manages to attend Harvard. It is Hannah, an unexpected life that makes her mother Marilyn give up her dream and return to family. Hannah always hides in the corners or under the table, being a dispensable person. In effect, she has a sensitive nose for love and discerns everything that others in her family never tell her.

Through the tragic story in an interracial family, Celeste Ng reveals race, gender, identity crisis and the scars behind personal growth.

Little Fires Everywhere is another masterpiece of Celeste Ng which was published in 2017. Once published, it won many awards. Alexander Chee, a well-known critic from *New York Times* praises the book: "...[A] novel about the burden of being the first of your kind--a burden you do not always survive" (qtd. in Z. J. Li: 5).

Little Fires Everywhere tells a series of stories between two families and family members, especially two mothers. Mrs. Richardson is a reporter and Mr. Richardson is a lawyer. They have four children and children are intelligent and toe the mark except the last girl Ivvy, who is regarded to be a black sheep, the wild card of the family (Ng, "Little" 5). As a middle class family, it takes root and lives in peace in Shaker Heights, going through life mechanically. The other mother Mia who is an artist and a single mother travels around everywhere with her daughter Pearl. They live a carefree life in spite of no stable life; they do what they like with a poetic soul regardless of no decent work. When Mia together with Pearl wanders to the bourgeois town, Shaker Heights; when she goes into the Richardson's life as an hour worker; when friendship even love grows up between Pearl and the children, two vastly different values collide and are adopted meantime.

Generally speaking, the two novels depict how the so-called main-stream society (both the White world and a large quantity of those who obey the rules completely)

misunderstands and estranges the minority (such as the Lees in *Everything I Never Told You* and Mia and Pearl in *Little Fires Everywhere*).

1.2 Background of This Research

Fiction is first of all the art of time, for it is embodied by means of language. Meanwhile it is also the art of space. No narrative can completely cancel space to seek the pure existence of time (Hu 108). At least, space provides the context plot development of narrative, prop and foreshadowing. With the writing practice of in-depth, spatial narrative, as a kind of narrative technique and strategy, gradually becomes the consent and conscious art pursuit of writers. What's more, spatial narrative provides possibility and basis for diversity and richness of art. Supporting spatial narrative does not mean canceling time. On the contrary, spatial narrative must be based on time series to construct the logic and order of narrative. Only by the combination of space and time, can writers write great works and pave the grand avenue for the future novels. Therefore, contemporary writers try to make use of non-linear narrative, by applying spatial elements, such as space imagery to plot development, characterization and meaning construction in the process of narrative. They pay more attention to functions and connotations of spatial narrative (He 1).

Narrative characteristic of space imagery is not based on the sequence of time, which differs from other traditional works that are on the basis of linear narrative, but puts more emphasis on horizontal connections between events. Causal and logical relationship is weakened and disorganized, thus presenting a kind of structure like pictures (Sun 12).

Even though *Everything I Never Told You* and *Little Fires Everywhere* have got wide attention since they were published, there are just a few book reviews and several master's theses. Especially for the novel *Little Fires Everywhere*, there are only two book reviews. By searching CNKI, I have just found seven master's theses, only one of which studies *Everything I Never Told You* from the perspective of spatial

narrative, but the thesis refers to nothing about space imagery. Most of theses focus on race, self-identity, feminism and trauma.

In conclusion, as far as I am concerned, research on Ng's works is still in demand; hence I intend to analyze the two novels from the perspective of space imagery. In addition, what I should explain the reason why I analyze *Everything I Never Told You* and *Little Fires Everywhere* together is that they have something in common, such as value orientation and artistry, more importantly, space imagery whether macroscopic imagery or microscopic imagery.

1.3 Structure of This Thesis

Due to the similarities of space imagery in *Everything I Never Told You* and *Little Fires Everywhere*, I plan to apply space imagery as theoretical ground to analyze the two novels. Totally, there are six chapters in my thesis, which is made up of introduction, literature review, three significant chapters and conclusion. The introduction part includes introducing Celeste Ng and her two novels, as well as the background of my thesis. Literature review includes spatial narrative and space imagery with a view to offering theoretical framework for the later discussion and studies about *Everything I Never Told You* and *Little Fires Everywhere* at home and abroad. The third chapter deals with manifestation of space imagery based on some related theoretical concepts through two aspects--macroscopic space imagery and microscopic space imagery. Specifically speaking, in *Everything I Never Told You*, the whole text presents a keynote that you misunderstand me and I have something that I never told you, and in *Little Fires Everywhere*, just as is stated on the cover of the book, the novel is given to those out on their own paths, setting little fires (Ng, "Little" 1). Microscopic space imagery includes home, road, kitchen, school and corner. The space imagery recurring frequently helps to contribute to Celeste Ng creating her literature world. The fourth chapter deals with functions and connotations of microscopic space imagery. The space imagery plays a vitally important role in

characterization, destiny of characters and themes. Home and kitchen as space imagery reveal dilemma of modern females between family and career, school as space imagery uncovers racial prejudice, corner as space imagery shows Celeste Ng's sympathy for homosexuality, and road as space imagery deals with how different characters strive for their own self-development. The fifth chapter deals with Celeste Ng's literature world by depicting space imagery, including macroscopic space imagery and microscopic space imagery. To sum up, these three chapters are the center in my thesis. The last part summarizes what I find--Celeste Ng's unique literature world based on study of space imagery, offering possible reference for further study and meanwhile in this part I also point out some limitations of the thesis.

This chapter gives the brief introduction of Celeste Ng and her two works, *Everything I Never Told You* and *Little Fires Everywhere* and presents the background and structure of this thesis. The following chapter will deal with some theories related to the thesis and give an overall review of the studies on Celeste Ng's two works at home and abroad.

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Spatial Narrative and Space Imagery

Since the late 20th century, academia has seen a tendency towards “space turn”, which was considered as one of the most significant events in the domain of knowledge and politics then (Long 15). Scholars and writers began to lay stress on “space” in many fields, in particular, in the field of geography, politics and literature. It is the emphasis placed in the field of literature that leads to space narrative as a branch of narratology (Long 4).

For many years, narrative is looked on to be a matter of time, for story is only related to time, having nothing to do with space. As Joseph Frank summarizes in his essay *The Idea of Spatial Form* Lessing says that: “literature ... makes use of language, composed of a succession of words proceeding through time ... to harmonize with the essential quality of its medium, must be based primarily on some form of narrative sequence”. Lessing regards literature as time-based, while painting and sculpture are space-based. The stress on the timeliness of narrative is badly obvious; linear language and causality of events both following time series. As a result, nearly all the traditional works are involved in the matter of time (X. Li 69).

With the late 20th century coming, there came the well-known “space turn” in the domain of philosophy and literature. Narratology also followed the tendency and then began to pay more attention to space in works (Long 33).

Spatial narrative first begins with Joseph Frank. He puts forward the concept of “spatial form” in *The Idea of Spatial Form* and discusses the spatial form from three

aspects--the spatial form of language, the physical space of the story and the psychological space of the readers (Frank 7). Following Frank, many scholars begin to study spatial narrative. Henry Lefebvre brings up the concept of social space in his essay *The Production of Space*. He treats space as a production of human interaction and a way of being existent. His center is that, "[social] space is a [social] product" (Lefebvre 26). Mitchell is the first one to distinguish spatial forms (He 2). In *Spatial Form in Literature: Toward a General Theory*, Mitchell believes that there are four spatial forms, including literal layer--the physical existence of the text, descriptive layer, traditional temporal--dimension and metaphorical space behind the text (qtd. in Y. Wang: 4).

Gabriel Zoran's *Towards a Theory of Space in Narrative* has reached the theoretical height and been praised to be the most practical theory up to now (Long 12). Zoran classifies space into three layers in his essay. First of all, he states that attention paid to space in fiction is far less than that paid to time, and both space and time are two vital dimensions of narrative. He treats the space in fiction to be a whole and divides it into three parts vertically-- the topographical level, the chronotopic level and the textual level (Zoran 320). In *the Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard studies a series of space imagery from the perspective of phenomenology and psychology, ushering a new era when space imagery is applied to literary criticism (Wu 8).

Afterwards, when employing spatial narrative to analyze literary works, we will find space imagery plays a vitally important role in non-linear narrative. The space recurring frequently in the spatial narrative attracts much attention of a great many writers and critics. The development and perfection of space narrative closely combines space and human subjectivity. What's more imagery contains the writer's thoughts, feelings and creative purposes. The combination of space and imagery forms the concept of space imagery. Space imagery plays an important role in the narration of the novel. Space and imagery both carry the practical activities of human beings. Under the writer's subjective consciousness, space imagery constitutes

different spaces, showing the form and practice of physical space, psychological space and social space, and expressing the connotation of different spaces (Y. X. Li 11). Therefore, apart from its own geographical attributes, space imagery appears in texts as valuable and realistic existences.

In *the Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard studies a series of space imagery, such as house, corner and so on. He holds the view that the space which is under control of imagination and creation is no longer the cold and merciless space, measuring the work and dominated by geometric thinking, but instead it is the space that is experienced in person by people. The space is not experienced from an empirical perspective, but from an aspect of all the particularity of imagination and creation (Bachelard 27).

David Mickelsen's research on space imagery turning up in works turns out to be the theoretical framework of study of space imagery. In *Types of Spatial Structure in Narrative*, he believes spatialization of narrative language style consists of word games, complex syntactic structure and imagery juxtaposition (Mickelsen 63-78). Zhou Jing analyzes David Lodge's novel *Changing Places*, applying space imagery which is referred to in David Mickenlsen's essay. She thinks the space imagery recurring frequently in the text helps to achieve the effect of the spatiality of narrative structure. Space imagery is not just an image in narrative. Due to its recurring in the text, it brings about the effect of space (Zhou 9). In the domestic research, Zhao Yuanxia is the first one to make a comprehensive research on the functions of space imagery. She believes there are three functions in total, respectively, metaphorical and symbolic meaning of space imagery leading to textual space; by means of space imagery, retaining time and meanwhile emphasizing space; space imagery adding to the sense of space and layer (Zhao 24).

Celeste Ng, whose narrative style is unique, arranges on purpose a series of space imagery in her works, breaking linear narrative based on time. Most of space imagery in her works is road, house, school, kitchen and corner. The space imagery recurring in her works has a greatly important effect on narrative process. A series of space

imagery, like Montage, is placed in front of readers, bringing about defamiliarization and a sense of novelty.

In conclusion, space imagery described by Celeste Ng is rich and colorful, and provides us readers with a unique angle to comprehend her works. Her special style of spatial narrative adds to artistry of her works. By means of space imagery, Celeste Ng creates literature world of her own.

2.2 Studies of the Two Works Abroad

Since *Everything I Never Told You* was published in 2014, it has received many awards and praise from the public, media and critics. Afterwards, it was selected to be the best seller by *New York Times*. Though it drew wide attention abroad and home and was regarded as the best book of the year 2014 on Amazon, most of comments on it abroad just lie in book reviews, there being no dissertations.

New York Time Book Review, American most influential review of media, says: “even if we know with this kind of story, we have never seen in the novel in the United States, at least, before Celeste Ng, no one has dealt with this kind of story. It tells about burden and pressure of the heterogeneous. The burden and pressure usually destroy a person rather than shape a person” (qtd.in Z. J. Li:6). Besides praise for its wrenching story plots, the narrative skills of the novel also attract critics’ attention. Los Angeles Review of books says, “Ng moves gracefully back and forth in time, into the aftermath of the tragedy as well as the distant past, and into the consciousness of each member of the family, creating a series of mysteries and revelations ...Ng is masterful in her use if the omniscient narrator, achieving both a historical distance and visceral intimacy with each character’s struggles and failures...” (Tobar 5). Sally Bland argues that the book is a chronicle of deficiency in communication (36).

There is only one academic study from the perspective of “the Other”, which is named “the Other” Trapped in a Bi-cultural Dilemma—An Analysis of Celeste Ng’s *Everything I Never Told You* published on International Conference on Arts, Design

and Contemporary Education (ICADCE, 2016) in Moscow, Russia. From the point of both Chinese-American and American, it reveals Chinese-Americans encounter cultural conflicts in cultural hybridity, vividly producing the predicament of “the other” living in cultural cracks (Yin and Liu 312-315). To sum up, studies abroad mostly focus on story plots and ethnic cultures. Thus much blank needs to be filled up and further studies need to be made.

As for her second novel *Little Fires Everywhere*, owing to its publication in 2017, studies on the text are even fewer, most of which are book reviews. The New York Times Book Review gives its remark on the content of the novel. It’s this vast and complex network of moral affiliations that make this novel even more ambitious and accomplished than her debut ...It is a thrillingly democratic use of omniscience (Ng, “Little” 1). New York Times bestselling author, Jodi Picoult makes comments on the relevant themes in the *Little Fires Everywhere*, “with brilliance and beauty, Celeste Ng dissects a microcosm of American society just when we need to see it beneath the microscope ...And perhaps most importantly: do the faults of our past determine what we deserve in the future. (Ng, “Little” 2)

In conclusion, we can easily draw a conclusion that the studies on *Everything I Never Told You* and *Little Fires Everywhere* abroad are mostly related to contents of the two novels, and the relevant themes. Skills concerning narrative is one in a million, especially studies from the perspective of spatial narrative being blank.

2.3 Studies of the Two Works at Home

Although studies on Celeste Ng’s works abroad are rare, studies on *Everything I Never Told You* at home are relatively richer. I searched the Internet and found eight Master’s theses and more than thirty journals. I am classifying the studies into several groups just as follows:

1. Interpretation of the relevant themes in the novel, such as ethnic family, gender, family expectation. Gui Zijin’s thesis *Identity Search of Marginal Man in Everything I*

Never Told You reveals situations and origins of marginal man, which contribute to awkwardness of marginal man in pursuing American dreams based on the theoretical framework of Park and Stonequist. As he puts it in his thesis, “as a disadvantaged group in society, marginal men are faced with immense pressure resulting from various and complex reasons. Social inequality, ethnic discrimination and other unsafe social elements are the main obstacles stopping them from achieving their dreams... facing all the difficulties, they may have the following four responses: assimilation, return, poise or transcendence...” (Gui 43). In *A Study on Ethical Relationships of Cross-Ethnic Family in Everything I Never Told You*, Yang Wei employs theory of “The Other” and feminism of Beauvoir to probe into ethical relationships from two aspects--husband along with wife, and parents together with children, drawing a conclusion that cross-ethnic is faced with complex ethical predicament (58). In *For Them the Bell Tolls: A Socialist Feminist Critique of Everything I Never Told You*, Zhang Ce reveals three primary causes for women’s oppression in the man-dominated society: gender roles, sexual division of labor and collectivity of oppression from the perspective of socialist feminism. She supposes that inborn gender roles make women under constant control of men. While traditional sexual division of labor reinforces female subordinate position, meanwhile the invisible oppression from friends and family participates in the collectivity of oppression of female characters. Thus, under the effect of many factors, women have fallen victims to the patriarchal society” (Zhang 56). There is an article named *Interpretation of Kitchen Imagery in Everything I Never Told You* probing into female living conditions and female consciousness in the light of kitchen imagery (Fu 9).

2. Studies on translation of *Everything I Never Told You*. Gu Dong’s and Wang Wei’s Master’s theses make language analysis from the perspective of translation. In *A Report Based on the Translation of Everything I Never Told You*, Gu Dong chooses the former two chapters to translate as practice based on the theoretical framework of Dynamic Equivalence to achieve equivalence at lexical, syntactic and textual level between the original text and the target text (3). In *A Report on the Translation of*

Everything I Never Told You, Wang Wei applies Halliday and Hasan's cohesive devices namely, reference, substitution, conjunction and lexical cohesion to the translation practice, coming up with translation strategies, like reproduction, omission, amplification and conversion to make the target text fluent in expression and coherent in meaning (6). In a word, analyzing the novel in a light of translation can help contribute to fill up the blank of the studies on *Everything I Never Told You*.

3. Aesthetic value. In *Study on Literary Aesthetic Value of Celeste Ng's Everything I Never Told You based on Response-inviting Structure*, Zeng Xiaoyu analyses how response-inviting structure is incarnated in the below aspects, respectively narrative structure, semantic construction, rhetorical devices and multiple sentiments, combining Iser's Response-inviting Structure in Reception Aesthetic Theory with five levels of literary work structure put forward by Zhu Liyuan, a domestic specialist in Reception Aesthetic Theory. Then Zeng Xiaoyu arrives at a conclusion that the novel is full of features of Response-inviting Structure, constantly calling on readers to take part in the meaning construction (53). In the *Tragic Beauty of Reticence--A Study on Traumatic Theme of Everything I Never Told You*, Li Zhujun probes into traumatic aesthetic value from the perspective of trauma theory. First of all, she analyses individual traumatic symptoms and collective traumatic symptoms, then looks into causes of traumatic symptoms, finally concludes how to achieve traumatic aesthetic value through traumatic narrative (Z. J. Li 5).

4. A analysis of narrative skills. Li Yue analyses the novel in a light of narrative. The novel starts with a suspense, adopts non-linear narrative, combining flashback and foreshadowing, changes constantly points of view and in the end accomplishes artistic features of paralleling the past and the present (Y. Li 78). Wang Ying's thesis *An Interpretation of Everything I Never Told You from Spatial Narrative Perspective* is the only one so far to analyze the novel based on spatial narrative. She applies Gabriel Zoran's theory—topographic space, chronotopic space and textual space to the text, at last the three dimensional spatial structure of *Everything I Never Told You* is set up vertically (Y. Wang 6).

As for Celeste Ng's *Little Fires Everywhere*, due to its latest publication in 2017, studies at home on it are rare. There are two book reviews. They both refer to the theme of the novel, just like one sentence on the cover of Chinese edition, "the best honesty is to live a life we really want, for which we are ready to struggle all our life" (Ng, "Little" 1). In addition, there are several periodicals. Li Xuesong analyzes its theme in *Pursuit—on the Way: Thematic Interpretation of Little Fires Everywhere*. Mia pursues her self-worth while Mrs. Richardson runs after rules (X. S. Li 183-184). In her another periodical Li Xuesong interprets the "fire" image, standing for the fire of origin of life and the fire of self-pursuit (168-169). Ai Qinghua explores growing up of Ivy from two aspects—Ivy's escape and her return (Ai 67-68).

This chapter gives an over view of the literature review about the studies of *Everything I Never Told You* and *Little Fires Everywhere* at home and abroad. In a word, there are two articles exploring imagery in the two works, but they do not give an overall description, which is exactly what I try to do in the following chapters. Next chapter will talk about manifestation of space imagery in Ng's novel.

Chapter Three

MANIFESTATION OF SPACE IMAGERY IN NG'S NOVELS

Situation creation and metaphor formation are first of all handled in narrative process of stories. In fact, situation creation is equal to construction of narrative space, and metaphor formation requests narrative space to be created to be equipped with emotion and philosophy. Combining situation creation and metaphor formation is actually what we call “space imagery”. Stories are bound to occur and develop in certain space, thus a series of space imagery is frequently seen in the text. Space imagery can be concrete or abstract, macroscopic or microscopic, bright or dark as well (Sun 22). Celeste Ng treats space imagery as a means of telling stories and stressing space. Space imagery recurring in the text is endowed with regular connotation that has symbolic meanings. It is space imagery that shows Celeste Ng's attitude towards stories and the ending. In this chapter, I will analyze manifestation of space imagery in *Everything I Never Told You* and *Little Fires Everywhere* in detail, expecting to offer a novel perspective for study on Celeste Ng's works.

3.1 Macroscopic Space Imagery

As the above is referred to, space imagery can be concrete or abstract, macroscopic or microscopic as well. What's more, space imagery can also show author's attitude to events and meanwhile can foreshadow the ending of stories. So in this part I am to give a detailed description of macroscopic space imagery in *Everything I Never Told You* and *Little Fires Everywhere* respectively.

3.1.1 Macroscopic space imagery in *Everything I Never Told You*

The title of the novel can be literally translated as “there is something that I never told you”. It is exactly Lydia’s voice. She hides her pains and dreams in her heart and never expressed them. In this bi-cultural family, every family member has his or her own hidden sufferings, which are just everything that they never told others. So what the title *Everything I Never Told You* takes on is a kind of atmosphere where everyone misunderstands one another. Misunderstanding is found everywhere in the text.

With the first sentence “Lydia is dead, but they do not know this yet” (Ng, “Everything”1), the novel gets the readers hooked. At the same time misunderstanding between family members appears. On the usual morning of the day, the Lees know nothing about Lydia’s death but the innocuous fact that Lydia is late for breakfast. As usual, Marilyn as well as Nath, Hannah waits for Lydia to go downstairs to have breakfast. After Lydia disappears, Marilyn looks back on what happened when Lydia was very young. When Lydia was only seven months old, Marilyn took the kettle off the stove and turned around only to find Lydia standing in the doorway of the kitchen. Lydia was strangely alert when she came in the kitchen for the first time. At that moment, what occurred to Marilyn is not that she missed Lydia’s first steps or how grown up her daughter had become but the thought what else had she been hiding flashed through her mind. From Lydia’s childhood, something that she never told her mother came into being. Marilyn scooped Lydia up and smoothed her hair and told her how smart she was, how proud her father would be when he arrived home. But she felt as if she had found a locked door in a familiar room, Lydia, still small enough to cradle, had secrets. Marilyn might feed her and bathe her and coax her legs into pajama pants, but already parts of her life [Lydia’s life] were curtained off (Ng, “Everything” 4-5).

At the beginning, a lack of communication and misunderstanding between each other is a kind of keynote that exists frequently in the text. Lydia’s death breaks the apparent balance, and nearly destroys every family member, making their

misunderstanding even worse. Father James finds comfort in his assistant, Louisa; mother Marilyn shuts herself into Lydia's room all the day, trying her every effort to find out the truth that Lydia was drowned in the Middlewood River. Older brother Nath addicts himself to alcohol in order to erase all his memory about Lydia. Younger sister Hannah imitates Lydia to go into the river at midnight, expecting to figure out the answer. Sadly, they digest their pains alone instead of communicating with each other although they love their family. In the text, James and Lydia wonder how it is possible to have been so wrong. Where have things gone askew (Ng, "Everything" 98)? As a matter of fact, it is a lack of communication that makes everything wrong and worse.

Being a Chinese-American, James puts up with much discrimination. For James, years of unabashed stares prick his spine as if he were an animal in the zoo; years of mutters in the street "Chink, gook, go home" sting his ears, difference has always been a brand on his forehead, and blazoned there between the eyes. It has tinted his entire life and has left its smudgy finger prints on everything (Ng, "Everything" 251). All his life, he tries desperately to fit in American world, avoiding being different from others. On the contrary, what Marilyn wants is being different. Their marriage is absolutely wrong in the first place because it is on the basis of misunderstanding. That is to say, James feels satisfied with Marilyn's integration into white America while Marilyn appreciates James' difference. Their cognition and value differ from each other. However, they avoid mentioning them, thus making themselves have something that she or he never told each other.

From the past when Marilyn's mother rejected their marriage to the present when their devoted daughter Lydia is drowned in the lake, they do not communicate with each other. They are never directly faced with Mrs. Walker's rejection instead of them just avoiding referring to the thing as if it had never happened. When Marilyn wants to apply for a job as an assistant of a chemistry professor so as to work on her academic career, James makes a seemingly gentle rejection without a heart-to-heart talk. After Mrs. Walker passes away, Marilyn awakens, making up her mind to go on

to pursue her dream to be a woman doctor. Then she leaves without leaving a word, which makes her husband and children fall into endless speculation. James thinks Marilyn must be aware of their false marriage and regret having married a Chinese-American like him. Children believe that they must have done something wrong, hurting their mother and making her leave themselves alone. Without deep communication, the relationship between family members becomes worse and worse.

As an apple in her parents' eyes, Lydia carries their suffocative expectations. Mother wants her to be a woman doctor and to be different, while father expects her to make friends with whites and blend in the American world. They force their dreams onto Lydia's shoulder without caring for Lydia's true voice. They wishfully think Lydia is good at lessons and is popular with her friends. However, in practice, Lydia declines in her performance at school and she has no a true friend, just assuming herself to be popular among her classmates. Lydia bears everything that she never told her parents in mind, rarely sharing her ideas with others. What Lydia used to be is vastly different from what her parents assume her to be. Although Nath knows something about Lydia, he also misunderstands her. He considers Lydia stays with bad boy Jack all the summer, so Jack is supposed to be to blame for Lydia's death. In effect, it is not Jack's fault, for Jack just longs to get close to Nath by approaching Lydia. Nath regards himself to be laughed at by Jack, but as a matter of fact, when it comes to important occasions of his life, Jack always gives him a helping hand. He misunderstands and estranges Jack.

To sum up, something that I never told you appears everywhere in the text. It is a lack of communication that leads to the tear-jerking tragedy in the biracial family. Much to our delight, at the end of the novel, the Lees begin to learn to communicate with other family members and try to show their voices to others.

3.1.2 Macroscopic space imagery in *Little Fires Everywhere*

In the novel *Little Fires Everywhere*, "little fires" are set here and there, just as

Van Gogh said, “there exists a fire in every person’s heart”. When we readers participate in reading the novel, we will find “little fires” run through the whole text. They are the seeds of life in mother’s womb. In addition, they stand for justice that is always ready to fight against inequalities. More importantly, they are fires representing dreams and freedom.

This novel grips us audience from the very beginning. A big fire happened to the Richardson family. Everyone in Shaker Heights was talking about the big fire that summer and how Isabelle, the last of the Richardson, had gone around the bend and burned the house down (Ng, “Little” 1). In reality, it is a fire by which Ivvy wants to fight against injustice. Ivvy, looked on to be a black sheep, a wild card by other members in Richardson family (Ng, “Little” 5), is actually brave, independent-minded, and rebellious. She wants to run away from the apparently orderly family, to seek for what she longs for and live a life she desires. Nevertheless she is trapped in the grand house.

When Ivvy meets Mia for the first time in her luxurious house, Mia opens a door in her, helping her set “little fires” in her heart. Before making the acquaintance of Mia, Izzy never feels happy, her mother often scolding her, Lexie and Trip often laughing at her. However, in the view of Ivvy, Mia is vastly different from her family and turns her into a person who is not what used to be. It never strikes her that one day she will become curious, friendly and open magically. She even feels that she has broken away from the fetters, undergoing transformation. To her great indignation, Mia and her daughter Pearl who she likes best have gone. They are the kindest, the most considerate and sincere people in the world that she has ever met. Nevertheless, they are chased away by her family. Everyone in her family is a betrayer, Lexie lying and using Pearl, Trip also taking advantage of her, Moody betraying her by design. What makes her resent most is that her father is a baby stealer (Her father is a lawyer who helps an infertile white couple to win a lawsuit to bring up a Chinese baby.) and her mother is at the root of all things. She insists that it is unfair, all of it, deeply unfair, which runs through Izzy’s mind all the night. As a consequence, at last Izzy sets a big

fire on her grand house to burn up all unjust things and let something new and just come out. Like after a prairie fire, it seems like the end of the world, the earth being scorched and black and everything green being gone at the same time after the fire, the soil is richer and new things can grow (Ng, “Little” 295).

In addition to the big fire at the very beginning, “little fires” are set in every place in the text. I intend to pick out several little fires to describe in detail. Mrs. McCullough is infertile though she likes children very much. She aborts seven times then she is painfully aware that every time something alive sparks in her, and that somehow little spark goes out without any signs (Ng, “Little” 131). The little spark in her stands for the seed of life in a mother’s womb, namely, continuance of parents’ life. Like an old saying in *the Holy Bible*, child is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. For parents, child is not only just a person, but also a place, a kind of Narnia, a vast eternal place where the present you are living and the past you remember and the future you long for all exist at once. It is a place you can take refuge as well (Ng, “Little” 146). Pearl and Richardson’s children of course in addition to Ivvy, although Mrs. Richardson is always finding fault with Ivvy, they are all the place, the eternal Narnia.

Compared with Ivvy’s bravery, her mother Mrs. Richardson is a coward. Mrs. Richardson just does what she thinks right, such as, getting a decent job, a beautiful house and smooth and steady life, thus giving up what she really wants. What Mrs. Richardson gives up is exactly freedom. Unconsciously, Mrs. Richardson devotes all her life to her husband and children and family, like a trapped bird in a cage, giving up her dream. Jamie Reynolds, a boy who young Elena admired when she was in the seventh grade, invites her to live a life with him in a VW van like camping out. More importantly, they can go anywhere. Elena wants so much to go with him, anywhere, and to kiss the crooked, bashful smile, but where is their food from? Where do they bathe? And what will her parents say, the neighbors, the teachers or her friends (Ng, “Little” 190)? Eventually, young Elena kisses Jamie on the cheek and cries and at last, Jamie is gone alone and Elena never sees Jamie again afterwards. Months later, Elena

meets Mr. Richardson and is with him, knowing that they will marry, buy a house, and settle down. Elena tells to herself, the days between she and Jamie is gone and the little fire goes out too. All her life, she believes that passion, like fire that is bound to be out of control is a most dangerous thing. It even can burn down stale walls and cross the chasm, spreading at a fast speed. And only if given a breeze, it will spread hundreds of miles. Consequently, it is essential that the little fires should be kept with much caution, and controlled properly in case of a big fire (Ng, “Little” 191). This is Mrs. Richardson’s living philosophy which is practical for her. For her, it is common to give up something less important in order to keep something more important such as a beautiful house, a decent job, a loving husband and healthy and happy children. In her view, the little fire representing freedom should be put out.

In the whole text, Mia is indeed a person who sets “little fires” in others. There is a “Mia” in everyone’s heart, hungering for freedom, pursuing dreams and fighting against injustice, but it is put out by most of us since we all want a steady and secure life as Mrs. Richardson does. Mia follows her own heart to pursue her dream to be a photographer in spite of her parent’s disapproval and cutting off economic support; though she is poor materially and has to endure many hardships. Mia’s life style and attitude have a positive influence on her daughter Pearl and the Richardson’s children, even including Mrs. Richardson when she roams to Shaker Heights. Indeed, Mia is the very person who sets “little fires” on her own path.

Generally speaking, in the two novels, Celeste Ng manifests macroscopic space imagery on purpose as a strategy of space narrative, offering us a spatial structure like pictures meanwhile contributing to helping us to have a complete comprehension on her literature world she creates in her works.

3.2 Microscopic Space Imagery

Specific space in the text is endowed with specific imagery, and space fuses unique comprehension, imagination, ideology and emotion of the writers. Space

imagery is existent space as some imagery, it recurring frequently in the text to form metaphor. Celeste Ng is specialized in creating space imagery. Road, school, home, kitchen and corner are the space turning up frequently in her works. She projects her thought and emotion to the space, which makes the space have a symbolic meaning, thus forming space imagery. In this part, I mean to study microscopic space imagery in her works.

3.2.1 Road as space imagery

Connecting different spatial locations is what we call lines in geometry, and in our life we call them roads (Y. G. Wang 21). There exists the vocabulary, like starting, leaving in Celeste Ng's works, which is not only a realistic state, but also a kind of attitude towards life. Road, from limit to limitlessness, is a vital means to the vast universe from narrow living space. Only if the road is winding in the distance, can we run away delightedly from the dull life. When George Sandy (1804-1876, a French Female writer) dreamed of strolling on the beach, she saw the passing of the life and wrote a sentence--there is nothing more beautiful than a path, which is a symbol of lively and various life (Y. G. Wang 22).

From the above statements, we can conclude that road leading to the unknown world, can change one's destiny. Marilyn in *Everything I Never Told You* embarks on the road leading to her dream to be a woman doctor from Middlewood town to Toledo. After her mother passes away, Marilyn realizes that her life is the same as her mother, Marilyn involving all her life in her children, husband and kitchen day by day with her dream to be a doctor unfinished. After that day, Marilyn reminds herself every night that she does not want the same life as her mother and there will be more to her life than that when she wants to give up her dream. Thus Marilyn runs away the trapped family to Toledo to finish her education. However, three months later, an unexpected life comes into her womb, making her action to pursue her dream aborted.

This time Marilyn embarks on the road from Toledo to Middlewood, she returns her house life unwillingly, which makes her dream shattered.

Mia in *Little Fires Everywhere*, a non-conformed woman, persists in her dream to be a photographer without caring about what others say. Mia rejects accepting rigid and still life, thus being on the road from place to place, which makes rebirth and restart her themes of photography. From her hometown to the New York School of Fine Arts, Mia begins to pursue her dream to become a photographer. Her practical parents assume art to be a waste of time and refuse to support her tuition fee, so Mia has to pay her own way if she wants to go art school badly. Without any economic support, Mia has no alternative but to do three part-time jobs a day and relies on scholarship to finish her study. Unfortunately, one year later, the school cancels system of scholarship. To get enough money to carry on her education, Mia is forced to earn money through surrogacy for a white couple. Owing to her younger brother's sudden death and her love for her baby in her womb, Mia makes up her mind to bring up her child by herself. So she leaves New York and roams from one place to another, taking her beloved daughter Pearl and her dream to be a photographer.

Not only can Road as microscopic space imagery offer the possibility to meet others, but also be fateful to characters. In conclusion, a thorough understanding of road as microscopic space imagery can help readers comprehend Celeste Ng's literature world better.

3.2.2 House as space imagery

House is first of all an architectural concept, sheltering people and offering physical place for people to live, work and learn in. Chinese famous theorist Li Yu also puts great emphasis on the effect that house has on sheltering people and mapping of spiritual relations between people and house (Y. Li 318). And later Sigmund Freud proposes: "womb is actually a kind of biological architectural space, and a sort of prototype of attic space, which adds one angle of psychoanalysis to

connotation of house”. House is believed to be a symbolic system of humanitarianism, since it means shelter, settlement and privacy (X. S. Zhao 139).

When returning to the field of literature, house as a material entity existing in the form of space in our realistic life, becomes space imagery which carries multiple metaphors through writers’ creation. Especially female writers frequently refer to describing house, conscious and unconscious, which is not simple description of the material entity, but refers to house as space imagery which has rich literary connotations.

When the realistic and material architecture--house is described in literary works; when house is coming into the sight of writers and recreated by them, house, material entity becomes an aesthetic carrier which carries social and cultural connotation, gradually subliming a kind of space imagery carrying multiple metaphorical meanings. Briefly speaking, house as space imagery carries cognition, subjective emotion and value judgment of writers. In this chapter, I am intending to probe into characters’ spiritual space from the angle of house as space imagery to uncover Celeste Ng’s literature world.

By means of house as space imagery, Celeste Ng shows female living conditions in man-dominated society from a unique and acute perspective. Mrs. Walker, Marilyn’s mother makes her best endeavors to keep house including arranging housework, looking after her child and attending on her husband. She is trapped in the cage called house like a bird, devoting the whole life to the family. Even so, her husband still abandons her, leaving her and her daughter, Marilyn alone. Understanding her mother’s trapped and bleak condition, Marilyn is unwilling to be an angel in a house like her mother. Since Marilyn was young, she has made her every effort to work hard at school performance to run away from her family and her mother. Everything went well until Marilyn encountered James, her husband. An unexpected baby interrupted her education, causing her to marry James. From then on, Marilyn became a housewife like her mother in spite of her ever trying her utmost to go on her education. In the end, she ended up with abortion of her dream to be a doctor.

Mrs. Richardson and her friend Linda are both imprisoned in their grand houses. Apparently, they are in charge of their life and their husbands. As a matter of fact, they give up their own career, dedicating their life to their family. Mrs. Richardson is an obscure journalist from beginning to end although she dreams of being a famous reporter like her ex-colleague. She insists that her family, children and husband are the center of her life. As for her friend Linda, who marries a husband that loves her very much, she is seemingly happy. But Linda is unable to conceive her baby. Having been pregnant seven times but having aborted seven times, she believes it is her fault not to own a baby. In her point of view, in other words, in the opinion of the people in the man-dominated society, a woman who cannot be pregnant is the root cause of an incomplete marriage.

Virginia Woolf ever said that intellectual women should have a room of her own, which can stand for their independence. In Celeste Ng's works, maybe only Mia is a free woman, who has her own house and is not attached to her husband, so she can run after her dream and work on her favorite career. However, she is treated as an outcast by many people, representatives of main-stream society, especially Mrs. Richardson.

House can either be a shelter or a birdcage imprisoning individuals. In Celeste Ng's works, in most cases, house is like a cage trapping characters, in particular female characters.

3.2.3 Kitchen as space imagery

Over many years in man-dominated society, women are the group of people who are allocated to kitchen, spending much time cooking meals for their family and doing chores in kitchen. Women's labor within domestic sphere is unrecognized by the capitalist society (Hartman 187). Kitchen is also a cage confining female freedom. No matter which social role, daughter, wife or mother, monotonous and mechanical odd work in kitchen has an influence on women, making it for women a kind of

self-expression claiming love from men and self-realization of female values. There is no doubt that in *Everything I Never Told You* and *Little Fires Everywhere*, women show their love for husbands and children by means of cooking delicious food for them.

In the house which is divided into lounge, bedroom, living room, kitchen and so on, the kitchen well equipped with cooking facility is just the place female can take charge of. Women are endowed with the work cooking meals and doing chores in the kitchen when they are born. It is in the kitchen, a small and narrow world, that millions of women spend their whole life. Interpreting kitchen as space imagery recurring in Celeste Ng's works *Everything I Never Told You* and *Little Fires Everywhere* can help readers to contribute to apprehending living conditions of female characters.

Mrs. Walker, who is Marilyn's mother, a traditional American white woman, confines herself to keeping house, including arranging housework, caring for child and attending on her husband. A key point of keeping house is to manage kitchen. She assumes that a woman's duty is to manage kitchen, and to cook tasty food for her family. In *Everything I Never Told You*, kitchen is a prison and tomb for women. Superficially, women are the hostesses of the kitchen. However, in effect they are trapped prisoners of the kitchen, not being able to run away from the imprisonment of the kitchen and captivity as well as control of the man-dominated society.

Yet, in the kitchen, a private space, women can break hierarchy space to take advantage of own power. They can construct space of their own and reconstruct living space to attain self-identity and self-identification. Mia in *Little Fires Everywhere* reconstructs her own space to find the true self. Rarely does she spend her time in cooking the real meals in the kitchen. Instead she often brings food from the restaurant where she does a part-time job to reheat as their meals. Seldom does she spend her time toasting biscuits for her daughter, Pearl. Since she believes that her spare time is supposed to be taken to work on her photography rather than cook meals and do chores in the kitchen. She liberates herself from the confinement of the kitchen,

offering herself much time to work on her career. Doing housework is not the center of her life. What she wants to achieve is her dream to be a photographer.

When it comes to cooking in the kitchen, it is the total world for Mrs. Walker who is reconciled to putting herself in the kitchen. On the contrary, for Mia it is just fundamental work for living. Mia smashes shackles that kitchen gives her, freeing herself from much odd work.

3.2.4 School as space imagery

School, a kind of important public space, functions as a typical place where teachers and students can talk and communicate with each other. In the school, the major action is talking with others and being talked about by others. To a great extent, it actually is a “talking space”, whether the communication between teachers and students, or teachers and teachers as well as students and students. What people say not only can uncover some truth, but also can reveal their deep thought. Talking and being talked about can expose one’s inner world to the public. Talking and being talked about can be classified into two categories. Namely, firstly what people are talking about is someone else things, secondly what is talked about is one’s own thing. Whichever it is, it can see through one’s spiritual world.

School, as a kind of “talking space” is different from tavern where a variety of people come from different social classes. In the school, most of people are students and teachers, who are expected to be simple-minded, and not to have racial prejudice. However, in Celeste Ng’s works, it is in the school that serious and severe racial discrimination is put on the stage. The Lees are jeered at in the school. They do not associate with their neighbors, leading a lonely life, saying nothing of making friends with the white Americans. Their only family trip breaks off, for they are gazed at like a group of animals in the zoo owing to their color differing with white people. Their classmates keep the Lees at a distance. They gaze at what the Lees act in the school in the distance. The school, so-called the purest place, is filled with racial prejudice and

discrimination, conscious, unconscious and subconscious.

And it is the same case with Deja, a black girl in *Little Fires Everywhere*. She is constantly being picked on by her teacher, Mrs. Peters just due to her different color.

School should have been the purest place in the world, there being no racial separation and discrimination. On the contrary, in Celeste Ng's works, it is a very common phenomenon for black and yellow races to be discriminated in the school. It is no wonder that how severe the racialism is in the American world.

3.2.5 Corner as space imagery

In the process of narrative, corner is endowed with unique narrative function by Celeste Ng. Corner as space imagery can mirror inner thought of the characters in the works and reflect the writer's subjective emotion and what she intends to create literature world of her own. These people who are in the corner of their family or society are described less, compared with the main characters. They, tentatively, are named "corner people". They do not seize readers' attention away from the main characters on account of their being like invisible men in the works (Zhu 2). However, if carefully pondered, their existence is meaningful and marvelous. "Corner people" serve as a kind of foil to the main characters, and make comparison with protagonists. They seem to be in the corner ignored by readers. As a matter of fact, there is something in essence in it only if we readers carefully and deeply ponder.

In Celeste Ng's works, there are several "corner people" like Hannah, Jack along with Pauline and her friend Mal. They are described less detailed, contrasting with the leading characters. Nevertheless, they take the writer a lot of pains. They are a group of people through whom Celeste Ng constructs her unique literature world. First of all, I am intending to roughly refer to Hannah in *Everything I Never Told You*. Hannah Lee, about 10-year-old girl, is the third child in Lee family. In the novel, her exact age is not told by Celeste Ng, thus we can just infer her age from the time when her mother disappeared without leaving a word and the day when the older sister Lydia

was dead. She is the direct cause that pulls her mother back to the family. At the same time she is also the reason interrupts Marilyn's dream to be a woman doctor. Safely speaking, Lydia is the center of her parents, while Hannah is an insignificantly invisible girl, who is always sitting in the corner of the house, behind the sofa, or under the tablecloth. She makes every effort to be out of sight of her family, making sure that their territory in the family will not be slightly changed. Yet, to our great surprise, it is by means of her eyes that we have a clear insight into what happened in Lee family, thus we come to know inhibition and pains in the bi-racial family. Hannah, as omniscient point of view stands for the implied writer to present grief and pains in the family and uncover the truth behind the mystery.

Hannah belongs to one person of the group of "corner people". So do Pauline and Mal in *Little Fires Everywhere*. Celeste Ng gives less detailed description to Pauline and Mal on purpose, yet their existence shows the writer's literature world in which the writer expresses her sympathy for homosexuality. Pauline and her friend Mal are homosexual persons who do not come out of closet. In the 1970s in the America, the public were homophobic. Therefore, they do not dare announce their homosexual identity in order to protect themselves. They live with great care so as not to be found that they are homosexual by others.

From the above discussion, we can draw a conclusion that although "corner people" are given less description, they are the minor group whom the writer takes pains to portray in order that the writer can construct her literature world where she shows deep sympathy for them.

In this chapter I mainly present manifestation of space imagery in *Everything I Never Told You* and *Little Fires Everywhere*, including macroscopic and microscopic space imagery. Next chapter I will focus on different connotations of microscopic space imagery in the two works.

Chapter Four

CONNOTATIONS OF SPACE IMAGERY IN NG'S NOVELS

4.1 Connotations of Road as Space Imagery

Road, as an overt space is considered to be the window through which people can overtly talk about other people's privacy. In addition, road can connect different parts of the world. Therefore in a sense road can transform the destiny of the characters in the works. In this chapter, I am writing to interpret the connotations of road as microscopic space imagery from these two aspects.

4.1.1 Window of being watched

Gaze is a significant concept in the field of Visual Cultural Criticism. In Sartre's point of view, gaze is not watching others in action, but the subject realizes that he is being watched by others. Gaze makes the person who is being gazed at become an object (Sartre, "Being" 326). In the novel, being gazed at by others is the root cause that brings about character's spiritual harassment. Hell is other people (Sartre, "Plays" 153).

Stuart Hall points out that the white Americans gaze at ethnic group, making them become a kind of objects (273). As the only Chinese-American family in the small town, Middlewood in *Everything I Never Told You*, the Lee family is the watched objects and the different existence. Being not compatible with others, they are always watched and gazed at. James, who is a tenured professor in a college, is considered as "the other". From the time when he was born to the present, he is gazed

at uneasily like an animal in the zoo, only pretending to forget the predicament so as to escape from the reality, yet it is a false comfort for him. He, like an animal trapped in a cage, desperately ignores a crowd of tourists, assuming that he is running freely in the wild.

Even in Boston, she [Marilyn] sometimes saw disapproval in the eyes of the passersby. Her hair was no longer the white-blonde of her childhood, but it was still light enough to catch attention when bent toward James's inky black head in movie theaters, on a park bench. (Ng, "Everything" 51-52)

Marilyn's disappearance and Lydia's death are both gossiped about in the neighborhood. People gathering on the road near the Lee's house gossip about what happened. A couple of years ago, in the only family trip, no matter where they went, they were gazed at, which made them overburdened and have to end their trip ahead of schedule. The great pressure that being watched leads to causes why the whole family nearly to keep away from society, even to alienate neighbors. They do not associate with others, not holding parties or inviting guests. They do not have friends, thus becoming a lonely island in social life.

Chin proposes that Chinese-Americans, under the oppression of racism, form the weak mentality of self-contempt and self-rejection and deny their own racial identity and culture (69). James is ashamed for his being a child of a "paper son" and never talks about his parents in front of Marilyn. As a descendant of a "paper son", James sees himself and his kinsfolk as the targets of ethnic persecution. They also face an ongoing threat of deportation (Zeidel 1527-1528). In society, everyone can be gazed at and talked about. Nevertheless when gaze is placed in the racial environment where there exists unequal relationship, such as main-stream and marginalization, it can bring about much stress to people gazed at (F. Wang 65).

The known big fire set on the Richardson's house at the very beginning in *Little Fires Everywhere* is gossiped about by the people in Shaker Heights. Neighbors gathering in the street near the burnt house were talking about what had happened and who was to blame for the big fire. They talked about little lunatic Ivvy, the fourth child in Richardson family. During the whole summer, Richardson family was the

focus of being talked about.

Road as a window gazed at by people, one's privacy is exposed to the public (Chen 349). Gaze gives the people gazed at a great deal of pressure, making them feel much harassed. The people who are under great pressure always have no alternative but to choose to stay indoors seldom associating with others so as to keep away from other people's gossip.

4.1.2 Transformation of Characters' Destiny

Road can join different parts of the world. Thus in a way it can transform one's fate from one place to another. In the 1960s in the USA, western female movement entered the second wave (Gao 12). Many women in the western countries delivered speeches, wrote articles and paraded on the street, objecting to sexism. Many a woman in the domain of academy and literature participated in the campaign to fight for female rights. However, it is very difficult for them to struggle for equal gender rights. It is obvious that during that time women who sought for own rights and self-identity under the guidance of feminist ideology were looked on to be alien people. Thus they were reduced to marginalized people in the American world (Zhong 44).

Marilyn in *Everything I Never Told You* is such a woman who insists that she should work on her own career like a man and have a choice to select her husband. After marrying Chinese-American James, Marilyn became a housewife as her mother, with her dream to be a woman doctor unfinished. Her mother's death gave her a blow. She realized that she was not supposed to be trapped in the family. So after a long time for mental conflict, she left Middlewood for Toledo without leaving a word to go on her school study so as to work on her career. The road from Middlewood to Toledo is the start of Marilyn pursuing her dream. Unfortunately, several months later, an unexpected life came into being, her dream breaking off. In the end, she had to return to her family from Toledo to Middlewood. The road from Toledo to Middlewood

stands for her disillusionment of her dream. Her trip to run after her dream is on earth in vain. No matter how she struggles, she is at the mercy of the destiny, not taking charge of her own fate. As far as Marilyn is concerned, the road stands for nothingness.

Yet, in the point of Mia in *Little Fires Everywhere*, the road leading to the distance transforms her destiny. Leaving her hometown for New York City to seek after her education as a student in school of art laid the foundation for her further photography. After one year's school study in New York , a sudden death of her younger brother called her back to her hometown, and it was at that moment that she made up her mind to give birth to the baby she surrogated for a couple who were unable to conceive their own child and bring up her baby by herself. In order to escape from being gossiped about in her community and remove their doubts, Mia started her trip from one place to another. The road from her hometown to other parts of the America changed her destiny, making a naive student a mature single mother.

Coming to Shaker Heights, Mia set fires on Ivvy, the last child in Richardson family, opening a door for her. From then on, Ivvy become an open-minded, happy girl, which she had never imagined before. Nevertheless, on account of misunderstanding, Mia and her daughter Pearl were chased away by Mrs. Richardson and they were forced to leave Shaker Heights for another place, which caused Ivvy to become mad at her mother and decide to set fires on her big house to let something new regrow. Later, Ivvy followed Mia in want of living a free life as Mia. Mia's coming and leaving has a great influence on the Richardson's family, especially Ivvy.

All her [Ivvy] life she'd felt hard and hungry; her mother always criticizing her, Lexie and Trip always mocking her. Mia hadn't been like that. With Mia she'd been different, in a way she hadn't known she could be: in Mia's accepting presence she'd become curious and kind and open, as if under a magic spell. (Ng, "Little" 322)

Road joining different parts of the world, offers possibility for characters to change their destiny. People who pursue their dreams are bound to be by means of road standing for restart and rebirth. Owing to varieties of reasons and conditions, some people are successful in running after their dreams while others end up with

failure.

4.2 Connotations of House as Space Imagery

When returning to the domain of literature, house, as a material entity existing in the form of space in our realistic life, becomes a kind of space imagery which carries multiple metaphors by means of writers' creation. In particular, female writers frequently refer to description of house, conscious, unconscious and sub-conscious, which is not simple description of the material entity, but mentions by design house as space imagery that has abundant literary connotation, bearing quantities of metaphorical meanings. In this chapter, I am expected to research into characters' mental space in *Everything I Never Told You* and *Little Fires Everywhere*, through studying house as space imagery with great care.

4.2.1 Trapped individuals

When the material architecture house is described in literary works, and when house is coming into the sight of writers and created by them, house, the material entity becomes an aesthetic carrier that carries social and cultural connotation, gradually subliming a sort of space imagery bearing multiple metaphorical meanings. With the aid of house as space imagery, Celeste Ng reveals female living space, especially their mental space in patriarchal society.

Traditionally, women are expected to keep their houses, and take good care of their children and husbands, but not to have their own career. They are dedicated to family, without their own time to enjoy themselves. Upon waking up every morning, the first thing they need to do is to satisfy the stomach of their children and husbands. Children want to have boiled eggs while husbands fried eggs, which needs women to serve different types, thus taking up their much time. The whole day is occupied by all kinds of odd work, including doing housework, cooking meals, washing as well as

ironing clothes and so on. Too much dull work gives them little time left to improve themselves. Like a bird in a cage, they lose their freedom, thus lose an opportunity to achieve self-worth.

Keeping house, she [Marilyn] had thought...She thought of her mother's insistence on changing clothes before dinner, though there was no longer a husband to impress with her fresh face and crisp housedress. It was after her father left that her mother had begun to teach [home economics]. (Ng, "Everything" 28)

Marilyn in *Everything I Never Told You*, used to be a rebellious woman. She pursued being different from others, trying her utmost to keep away from the life that her mother had designed for her--being a good woman, then finding a promising husband. Unlike her mother, she did not pin her hope on marriage or husband and did not do things as her mother told. Other girls had home economics class, while Marilyn must choose science class with boys. When other girls went shopping, made appointments with boys, or held parties, Marilyn was buried in her lessons. She spared every effort to move towards her goal--attending Harvard and becoming a woman doctor. However, encountering with James transformed her destiny. In the third year of Harvard, Marilyn selected American History as her optional course, James, a Chinese-American being a professor of the course. She lost her heart to James at the first sight, knowing he is different from other American boys. Afterwards, they went out for dates. Several months later, Marilyn's pregnancy interrupted her school study, causing her to have to drop out of school. She thought leaving school was temporary, and that one year later when she gave birth to her baby she would come back to school to go on her education. Yet the cruel truth was that after she bore Nath, followed by Lydia, her life centered on her husband, children and kitchen, with her education and dream left aside. Not until did the bad news that her mother was dead come, it occurred to her that she was just living the same life as her mother. All of a sudden, she woke up and made up her mind to leave home to go on her education to realize her dream to be a doctor. However, fortune making a joke of her, three months after she worked hard on her school study, an unexpected life came in her womb. Again, she had to interrupt her education, reduced to a housewife. Although

she struggled hard, never did she free her of confinement of the family. For many years, as a housewife, she was trapped in the house, spending all her time doing chores and cooking meals.

If we say Marilyn is trapped in the house owing to the man-dominated society. Then Lydia is trapped in the house because she shoulders her parents' dreams. Lydia who is the second child in the Lee family, inherits her mother's blue eyes, which makes her look more like a white girl. As a result, James wants her to make friends with white girls and fit well in the white world. As for Marilyn, owing to her disillusioned dream to be a woman doctor, she forces Lydia to bear her doctor dream.

Every day after school, Lydia was supposed to come home immediately to work hard at her study, having no time to attend parties with girls, go shopping and watch movies with them. During Marilyn disappeared, Lydia lived a miserable life, making a wish to pray her mother's coming back every night. Then someday Marilyn came back. As far as Lydia was concerned, it was her wish that worked at last. She determined to keep her word to do what her mother told her to do. Her mother asked her to study biology and chemistry to make preparation for her dream to be a doctor, and Lydia did so. From then so, Lydia was a carrier of her mother's dream, losing her own freedom. Just in order to realize her mother's dream, Lydia is confined in the house, spending all her time studying hard.

For both Marilyn and Lydia, house is not a shelter for them. As a matter of fact, it is a prison that imprisons them, physically and mentally.

4.2.2 Free individuals

On account of blooming development of feminist movement in the 1970s, female spiritual condition was paid more attention to. As the further expansion of female self space, female spiritual emotion goes out of repressive state. Consequently, writers, especially female writers, in the process of writing, constantly construct female spiritual space (Gao 34).

In Celeste Ng's works, she builds free house for women, causing them to hide in private space to listen to their own inner world, expressing their dreams and pursuits. By means of constructing female private space, Celeste Ng shows deep appeal of those women, as independent individuals fight against patriarchal rules and at the same time shows female affirmation and pursuit of self-realization. In the spiritual space, females release their stress, cure their pains and get rid of male gaze. House is their spiritual garden which men cannot enter. A house of their own is the place where women can display themselves. Only when they stay at their own house, can they construct their unique spiritual space.

In *Little Fires Everywhere*, Mia has a house of her own although it is rent. Whether a shabby house or a modern house it is a symbol of female independent economy. A house in the realistic life is the double guarantees of material and spirit. After Mia's younger brother died in a car accident, Mia realized that child is of great importance for parents. Then she decided to end the relationship with the couple whom Mia surrogated for and bring up her baby by herself. Relying on part-time jobs and selling pictures taken by her, Mia raised Pearl on her own. In order to seek for inspiration, Mia often roamed from one place to another with her daughter. For lack of money, Mia was forced to rent a house every time they roamed about one place. Surely, although the house was rent, since it was Mia who paid for it, in a sense, it belonged to Mia. In every rent house, Mia was engaged in her photography which she had been fond of since she was a little girl. Mia and Pearl would find an apartment for rent: usually a studio, sometimes an efficiency, whatever they could afford and wherever they could go month to month, for Mia did not like to be tied down (Ng, "Little" 30).

She is in charge of the rent house, not being attached to man (in effect, Mia does not have a husband). So she is taking charge of her own life. She can be engaged in what she is really interested in and can roam everywhere as long as she would like to go. In the free spiritual space, Mia has time to improve and makes herself refined. With time going by, Mia becomes an attractive woman. As an independent and

open-minded single mother, Pearl loves and respects her as well. When they settled down in Shaker Heights, Mia began to win respect from the Richardson family, in particular Ivvy, who admires Mia a great deal.

On account of economic independence and thus free spiritual space, Mia can move further towards her photography. She is not confined in the patriarchal society, freeing herself of the identity of traditional woman. Just as Mrs. Woolf in *Everything I Never Told You*, who is a doctor, has a house of her own. They both take possession of a house and career, without caring about what others gossip about. It is the free spiritual space that gives them an opportunity to realize their self.

In Celeste Ng's works, most of women are trapped in the house, having no time or chance to improve themselves. We can name a few, Mrs. Walker in *Everything I Never Told You* Mrs. Richardson and her friend Linda in *Little Fires Everywhere*. They are in a cage like birds, devoting all their time to husbands and children. Mia and Mrs. Woolf are exceptions in her works. Maybe what they achieve is a pictured blueprint that Celeste Ng wants to display for women.

4.3 Connotations of Kitchen as Space Imagery

Thousands of years of patriarchal rules place women in a marginal and subordinate position. In division of family labor, women are allocated to kitchen. Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) proposes that working in the domestic sphere is the major reason for female oppression (3). They spend most of their time cooking meals for their family and doing chores in the kitchen. Kitchen is a cage confining female freedom. Many women show their love for their husbands and children by means of cooking delicious meals for them, which they think is an embodiment of self-realization. On the contrary, there is a kind of women who do not limit themselves to the narrow space, which limits their life to a small world, losing the opportunity to experience a great deal of outer world. In this part, I will analyze two different kinds of women.

4.3.1 Compliant women in patriarchal society

Kitchen is a cage imprisoning female freedom. No matter which social role, daughter, wife or mother, monotonous and mechanical odd work has a crucial influence on women, making it for women a kind of self-expression claiming love from men and self-realization of female values. In Celeste Ng's works, Mrs. Walker and Mrs. Richardson are representatives of traditionally matronly role in man-dominated society.

Doris Walker in *Everything I Never Told You*, who is a teacher of home economics in high school, spends most of her time in kitchen. She supposes that every one of young ladies needs to keep house. All her life, she limits herself to her hometown, never going out of the scope. In Marilyn's memory, her mother never sent her to school without a hot breakfast. For Mrs. Walker, kitchen is the center of her life. What she treasures in the whole life is a cookbook named *Betty Crocker*. Even she underlined something key in the book.

If you care about pleasing a man--bake a pie. But make sure it is a perfect pie. Pity the man who has never come home to a pumpkin or custard pie. And under "Basic Eggs": the man you marry will know the way he likes his eggs. And chances are he will be fussy about them. So it behooves a good wife to know how to make an egg behave in six basic ways. (Ng, "Everything" 82-83)

In terms of Doris Walker, kitchen is the whole world and cooking is female work originally. "A good wife" is the role that she sets for herself. All her life revolves around her husband and child. Whether she is satisfied with herself depends on whether she can bake bread rather well. Kitchen is a closed shell, closing Doris Walker in it, which causes her not to have herself but just have her husband and child. Her life is eaten away in the kitchen.

She plans on a golden, vanilla scented life but ends up alone, trapped like a fly in the small and sad and empty house. This small and sad and empty life, after her daughter left her, has no trace of herself left except those pencil-marked dreams. (Ng, "Everything" 84)

Then it is time to refer to Mrs. Richardson in *Little Fires Everywhere*. She is an unknown reporter in her hometown. Her job is to report something unimportant, for

example, city council meetings, and zoning boards and who won the science fair. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Richardson wants to be promoted or improve herself to be a reporter in a famous newspaper company like her former colleague. But for her, what is the most important thing in her mind is her family. As a result, she gives up the opportunity to be promoted as a famous reporter. Baking cakes for children is a way to show love. In order to present a kind of warm family atmosphere, she often bakes cakes for children.

Like millions of women in the world, Doris Walker and Mrs. Richardson are typical female characters that patriarchal society expects of. They devote most of time to cooking meals and doing odd work in kitchen, revolving their life around their husbands and children. Kitchen is like a birdcage confining female whole life.

4.3.2 Rebellious women in man-dominated society

As the saying goes, where there is oppression, there is resistance. There are trapped women. Of course there are rebellious women. As feminist movement developed at that time, many women shared a common goal to define, establish and achieve equal political, economical, cultural, personal and social rights for women (Hawkesworth 20). Betty Friedan (1921-2006) criticizes the motherhood under capitalist patriarchy and calls for struggles against such feminine mystiques (Friedan 78). Some women are aware of sexism and intend to deny “the stereotypical definition of feminine sexuality” (Hooks 9). Marilyn is just a representative of rebellious women. It is because Marilyn sees what her mother’s life like that she decides to live a different life from her mother.

After marrying James, there was a time when Marilyn was reduced to a housewife, having no job and devoting most of her time to looking after James, Nath and Lydia. Marilyn’s mother, Doris Walker’s death gave Marilyn a blow on the head, making Marilyn realize that she was living the same life as her mother. Like her disdainful mother, Marilyn killed her time in kitchen. What’s more, owing to the

arrival of Nath, she stopped her education and put aside her dream. Kitchen is like a cage, making her cut off from the outer world. Fortunately, Marilyn is different from her mother, who is greatly willing to spend her time in kitchen. In order to break away from the tradition matronly role and run after her dream to be a doctor, she left without leaving a word resolutely and determinedly.

After she left home, she still resisted kitchen. She fed herself on porridge, sandwiches and spaghetti in the restaurant opposite to her rent room. She ran away thoroughly from kitchen standing for imprisonment. Unluckily, an unexpected life coming to her womb, she was forced to stop her education again and returned to her family. But even so, she still resisted kitchen, never cooking a real meal, feeding her family on canned food instead, by which she wanted to protest the traditional matronly role.

Mia in *Little Fires Everywhere* is another representative resisting kitchen. Mia is a freelance photographer. Apart from spending time doing part-time jobs to satisfy their basic needs, she devotes her time to working on photography. Every day she just does simple and easy meals which do not take her a great deal of time to cook. In addition, most of their food came from the restaurant where she did part-time jobs, such as rice and vegetables that were not sold out. Never does she waste her time on meals or chores in kitchen. The following is what Pearl saw when she visited the Richardson family for the first time.

There was Mrs. Richardson in the kitchen making cookies, of all things—something her [Pearl's] mother never did, though if Pearl begged hard she would sometimes buy a log of shrink-wrapped dough for them to slice into rounds. (Ng, "Little" 33)

She knows that being a housewife is not the center of her life and that she has her own dream. She is a mother of a girl, but first of all, she is herself. Her life is not only looking after family and her daughter, more importantly, but also working on her photography.

Going out of kitchen is the first step for women to break away from traditional matronly role that man-dominated society expects of them. Going out of kitchen also

gives women an opportunity to improve themselves and keep up with the outer world.

4.4 Connotations of School as Space Imagery

School, being an important public space, acts as a typical place in which there are conversations between teachers and students, teachers and teachers as well as students and students. In the school, the basic action is talking with others and being talked about by others, so in a sense, we can easily say school is actually “talking space”. Whether the conversations between students, teachers as well as teachers and students, what they talk about can uncover their inner world. What’s more, their conversations can reveal some truth. Although school belongs to “talking space”, it is vastly different from tavern where quantities of people come from different social classes, the rich or the poor, the businessmen or peasants. In the school, most of people are teachers and students. In some way, they belong to the group who are the purest people in the world. However, much to our surprise, it is not the same case in Celeste Ng’s works. In her two novels, most severe racial prejudice occurs in the school, which reflects how serious racial discrimination is in the American world. In this chapter, I will emphatically study racialism existing in American school.

4.4.1 Racial prejudice existing in the school

In the 1970s, America was considered as a melting plot, yet Congress, was terrified that the molten mixture was becoming a shade too yellow, and as a result, banned all immigrants from China, just allowing those whose parents had come to America before to immigrate into America (Ng, “Everything” 41). That was the reason why many Chinese immigrants entered America under false names. They pretended to be the children of the people who had immigrated to America, one of whom was James’ father in *Everything I Never Told You* with a false name. He came to America to get together with his “father” and gave himself an English name, Henry

in case he would be found and sent to China.

Although James was born in America, he often felt he was an outsider of the American world. Although given an opportunity to be educated at Lloyd Academy, James was forced to participate in an unfair test which was designed not to make Chinese's son pass on purpose. Much to the teacher's surprise at Lloyd Academy, James should pass the test, because he had read all the articles that he could collect. On the morning of the first day when James slid onto his seat and the girl beside him asked, "What's wrong with your eyes" (Ng, "Everything" 43)? It was at that moment that he realized he was the first oriental boy to attend Lloyd Academy and he was different from those white classmates. He spent twelve years at Lloyd Academy but he did not feel at home, never fitting himself in the American world. When he went past in the hallways, white students stared at him and he could hear their snickers as he turned the corner. Having spent ten years at Harvard, James still was an outsider. On account of his identity as a Chinese-American, he lost the opportunity to be a professor at Harvard and had to teach at a school in a small town--Middlewood. Even at that school, he had no friends and never got along well with his colleagues.

Yet after seven years at Harvard—four as an undergrad, three and counting as a graduate student—nothing had changed. ... He [James] still had few acquaintances and no friends. He still found himself shifting in his seat, as if at any moment someone might notice him and ask him to leave. (Ng, "Everything" 45)

When it comes to her children, they are also the victims to racial prejudice. Nath and Lydia are always left alone in school, having no friends. Lydia was ever asked by her classmate, "Do Chinese have belly buttons?" They treated the two oriental students as monsters. Surely, it is the same case with her brother Nath. He was ever made a fool in the swimming pool. They were playing Marco Polo (a game like hide-and-seek) and James forced him to join them. It was turn for Nath to be It (It in the game refers to a person who covers his eyes with his hands, then to seek for other persons according to where their voices come from), but something was wrong. The other children glided away, while Nath drifted all alone in the middle of the pool, eyes closed and wading in small circles and shouted: Marco, Marco. Then an older girl

shouted, “Chink cannot find China”, followed by others’ laughter (Ng, “Everything” 88). For Nath and Lydia, it is difficult to study and live at school.

In *Little Fires Everywhere*, Ivvy was stopped to go to school. That was because she defended Deja, a black girl against being abused by Mrs. Peters, their violin teacher. During the period of violin practice, Deja made some mistakes and Mrs. Peters asked Deja to stand up and said, “[you should be] nice and loud now in order that everyone could hear what they were not supposed to be doing.” To the resentment of everybody in the class, Mrs. Peters even said, “Deja, did you not understand me? You need me to speak in Ebonics” (Ng, “Little” 92)? Mrs. Peters picked on Deja, in front of all her students, and even referred to Deja to be a black. The overt racial discrimination made Ivvy angry, making her have no choice but to break Mrs. Peters’ bow to throw on her.

To sum up, school should have been the purest place and the students should have been the purest people in the world. Unexpectedly, in Celeste Ng’s works, school, standing for simplicity, however, is a place filled with racialism. Consequently, we can conclude how serious racial prejudice is in America.

4.4.2 Representation of power relation

All the time, America puts great emphasis on equal relation and equal rights. It is universally believed that people are born, equal. As a matter of fact, in Celeste Ng’s works, in school teachers are always above students. They do not show respect to students. In a similar way, they treat their students unequally. Whether men teachers treat women students as stereotyped women or women teachers are superior to their students.

Marilyn in *Everything I Never Told You* is looked on to be a stereotyped woman by men teachers. Michele Barrett points out that the gender division results in sexism (Barrett 20). In 1952, when Marilyn was in high school, she approached her principle to request to take shop class instead of home economics class. But her principle shook

his head and said that some of the equipment in the shop would be very difficult for her to use, and that having a girl like Miss Walker in the classroom would be very distracting to the boys in the class (Ng, “Everything” 28). Apparently, what he said is complimentary. In fact, we including Marilyn know that it is not a compliment. What he really means is a kind of prejudice against women.

In 1955, in her first year at Radcliffe, when Marilyn was enrolled in introductory physics, her advisor glanced at her without saying a word for a moment. Then he asked Marilyn why she wanted to take physics rather than English or history which was relatively easy for girls. Marilyn responded to him she was eager to be a woman doctor. He said why not be a nurse with a chuckle, which revealed his gender discrimination. When Marilyn had classes in lab, she found that all of students in the lab were boys except her. Sometimes her instructor said: “Miss Walker, you had better tie up your golden locks” (Ng, “Everything” 29). And her instructor did not believe that Marilyn could be good at physics like boys. But Marilyn always liked surprising people the way.

In *Little Fires Everywhere*, teachers in school tend to measure students using their own standard principles. Ivvy is a brave and unique girl. In class, when Ms. Bellamy asked students to memorize a poem as well as recite it in front of class, Ivvy selected a poem, which is written by a famous poet. On the basis of her fourteen and a half years, she felt she summed up life quite accurately. But she did not go further and was peremptorily interrupted by Mrs. Bellamy and was given a zero. She did not try to understand Ivvy but gave her one-sided evaluation. Superior to students, teachers always ignored students’ emotion and viewpoints. Teachers always treat students unfairly. In the work time of the school, Mrs. Peters is constantly behaving herself improperly.

Moreover, she was often biting sarcasm, especially to the second violins, especially the ones who — as one of the cellos put it drily — were “pigmentally blessed.” Stories about her had filtered down to Izzy even in middle school. (Ng, “Little” 76)

All in all, in Celeste Ng’s works, the most terrible things in the world often occur

in school, a pure place. It exactly reveals her satire to American realistic world.

4.5 Connotations of Corner as Space Imagery

Atmosphere is not simply background. It is an essence vitally affecting the spirit of the work (Kort 47). It is very significant for novels to have some special places to make characters lively. In the process of narrative, corner, as a kind of narrow space, is endowed with unique narrative function and connotation by Celeste Ng. Corner as space imagery can mirror inner thought and mental space of characters in the works, and at the same time reflect the writer's subjective emotion and what she intends to create literature world of her own. Those people who are in the corner of their family or society are described less, compared with the main characters. This kind of people, tentatively are named "corner people". Like invisible men, they do not catch readers' attention. However, their existence is greatly meaningful and marvelous. "Corner people" serve as a foil to the main characters and make comparison with protagonists. They seem to be in the corner, ignored by readers. As a matter of fact, there is something in essence in it only if we carefully and deeply ponder. In this part, I will refer to several typical "corner people" to probe into their inner world.

4.5.1 Hannah and Jack: hunger for love

Hannah, the last child of the Lee family, not only is the direct cause to make her mother, Marilyn return to family, but also the reason that interrupts her mother's dream to go on her education. Lydia is the center of the family, while Hannah is an unimportant "corner person". Hannah tends to hide herself away in the corner, in the closet or under the table cloth, trying to be out of sight of her family to make sure that there is no change in the territory division in the family. As a "corner person", she is always a contrast with her older sister, Lydia, who gets more love from her parents thus bears their expectations. On the contrary, Hannah is ignored by her family, her

parents talking without noticing her, Nath and Lydia giving no attention to her. Even one day, Marilyn only laid four plates on the table, only to realize that she forgot the existence of Hannah until Hannah came near to the table.

Lydia [left her house]? A vision of life without her sister in it had flashed across her mind. She [Hannah] would have the good chair at the table, looking out the window at the lilac bushes in the yard, the big bedroom downstairs near everyone else. At dinnertime, they would pass her the potatoes first. She would get her father's jokes, her brother's secrets, her mother's best smiles. (Ng, "Everything" 22)

The ignorance leads to Hannah's sensitivity to love. She is sensitive to finding what love is. Once Nath, Lydia and Hannah went swimming in the Middlewood River and met Jack. One thing attracted Hannah's attention. One drop of water from Nath dripped on the hand of Jack, and he stared at the drop of water then licked it like tasting the sweetest honey. Nobody noticed the moment except Hannah. Years of yearning for love made her sensitive, the way a starving dog twitched its nostrils at the faintest scent of food. She could not mistake it. She recognized it at once: love, one-way deep adoration that bounced off did not bounce back; careful, quiet love that did not care and went on any way (Ng, "Everything" 211).

Meanwhile, Hannah loves every one of her families, knowing what has happened in the family. She knows Lydia's great pressure, her parents' pains after Lydia's death and Nath's guilt. Hannah contributes to undoing the knot of their family. She wakes up love in her family, her father playing games with her as he did with Lydia ago, her mother talking to her gently, and Nath intending to share everything with her. She plays a crucially important in reuniting her family after Lydia's death.

Another "corner person" in *Everything I Never Told You* is Jack, who lives in a single parent family opposite the Lee family. His mother, Jennet Woolf is a doctor, without much time to look after him. In addition, nobody knows who his father is and where his father is. Jack turns up in front of everyone as a wild boy. But when he meets Nath, he is different from ordinary days. When they were young, Nath was laughed at and rejected. Only Jack could help him and stay with him. Jack is thirsty for contacting with Nath but meanwhile he is afraid to be found he loves Nath by

others. Especially, he loves a Chinese-American, so he does not dare to express his love for Nath, just hiding away love in his mind. In this world, he is always a person to seek for love.

As ignored “corner people” in the family or in the society, Hannah and Jack are dying for being loved all the time.

4.5.2 Pauline and Mal: enjoying the corner of their own

Hannah and Jack desire to be loved, while there is a kind of “corner people” who live a tranquil and leisure life without caring about the outer world. In *Little Fires Everywhere*, Pauline and Mal belong to this kind of “corner people”. Pauline is an artist specializing in photography and is a leading figure in the field of photography. Her friend, Mal is a poet. They lived together. In the 1970s, homosexuality was looked on with hatred in America. Thus Pauline and Mal dare not go out of closet, on the contrary, just staying together not letting others know their homosexual identity.

After Mia met them, they were very friendly and kind to Mia, who had to support herself to go on her school education because her parents thought that it was a waste of time to study art and ended their economic support. They knew Mia had a poor pocket, so every time Mia paid a visit to them, they insisted she stayed for a dinner and pushed her to eat much and take meals home that they had not eaten up. From time to time they invited Mia to live in their guest room for a long time so as to save much money to go on her study. When Mia had to interrupt her education to get much money to support herself, they even suggested that they could offer to lend a great deal of money to help her. In terms of Mia, they, especially Pauline are the people who lead the way for Mia and give her too much help. It is their kindness that helps Pauline and Mal achieve a lot in their career.

Pauline and Mal would always press Mia to stay for dinner. They knew, by now, about the three jobs, and Mal would urge extra serving on her [Mia], would send her home with Tupperware full of leftovers, which she would return on the next visit. They would, in fact, have encouraged her to stay the night, to settle into one of their guest rooms and stay for good, if either

of them could have thought of a way to suggest it. (Ng, “Little” 207)

Although they are kind and famous artist, they do not dare to go out of closet to announce their homosexual identity. Their unique personality, free career and inner tranquility contribute to them enjoying their corner without caring about the outer world.

This chapter fixes on different connotations of microscopic space imagery in Ng’s novels, consisting of road, house, kitchen, school and corner as space imagery. The following chapter mainly analyzes Celeste Ng’s literature world on the basis of macroscopic and microscopic space imagery in the two novels.

Chapter Five

NG'S LITERATURE WORLD BASED ON SPACE IMAGERY

Celeste Ng's works are filled with much space imagery, macroscopic and microscopic space imagery, respectively including road, house, kitchen, school as well as corner. The space imagery creates Celeste Ng's literature world. Road, house, kitchen, school as well as corner are the specifically geographical and literary space in Ng's novels. The space of road, house, kitchen, school as well as corner not only has physical significance, but also has literary significance. Ng projected her emotion on the space, making the space become space imagery. What's more, the space has symbolic significance and participates in the narrative of the Ng's novels. It not only forms the main physical space for the characters in the novels, but also blends with the writers' emotion, forming the Ng's unique literature world. The writer does not describe the space imagery by accident. On the contrary, she gives detailed description to the space imagery on purpose to create her literature world. In this chapter, I am expected to study Celeste Ng's literature world on the basis of the space imagery in *Everything I Never Told You* and *Little Fires Everywhere*.

5.1 Dilemma of Women between Family and Career

House and kitchen as space imagery in Celeste Ng's works reveal female imprisonment. Whether in western countries or in China, women are most bound up in marriage. In most literary works, in particular in works of contemporary female writers, they pay much attention to female living condition, depicting the vast disparity between ideality and reality in terms of love, marriage and career. More

importantly, most of female writers describe professional women's dilemma of going out of and returning to family, hovering outside and inside of the family, like sandwich layer of the patriarchal barrier.

In *Everything I Never Told You*, Marilyn's dream is to be a doctor in medical circle where men take up most of positions, for which she worked hard in her school performance. However, when she wanted to apply for a position as an assistant, only to be rejected by James, whose reason was that when he became a tenured professor, they were not short of money. Her mother's death made Marilyn realize that she was away from her dream to be a woman doctor further and further. Marilyn decided to run away from her family to pursue her dream, but in vain. Hannah's arrival drew her to return to her family, reduced to a housewife, repeating her mother's life that she had ever looked down upon.

Jennet Woolf has her career, being a doctor which is admired by most of women, especially Marilyn. Yet Jennet Woolf has no time to look after her son, Jack, making him wear untidy clothes and act as a wild boy, what's worse, causing him to be lonely mentally. She also loses her husband and marriage. What Jennet presents to us is her successful achievement, but who knows her loneliness and sadness in her mind.

Mrs. Richardson in *Little Fires Everywhere* is a reporter. Seemingly, she keeps a balance between family and career. As a matter of fact, in order to look after her family, children and husband, she gives up the opportunity to improve herself to be a famous reporter in a well-known newspaper company. As for her, what is the most important thing in her life is her family. Career is just a kind of decoration for her planned life.

In Celeste Ng's works, Mia is a most successful woman who has enough time to work hard on her career-photography. Apart from doing part-time jobs to meet their basic needs in their life. She spends most of time carrying on her photography. Never does she spend time cooking real meals for her daughter, Pearl. As a result, Pearl admires greatly family atmosphere of the Richardson when she smells nice flavor of baking cakes. So Pearl would rather spend most of time in the Richardson family than

stay at her own home. Her career is achieved at the expense of not being able to offer a comfortable life to Pearl.

In realistic life, female stereotyped gender role, tradition labor division, and intangible oppression from relatives and friends indeed make women imprison their dreams and ambition in trivial family life. Jenet and Mia break away from being a housewife to pursue their dreams at the cost of giving up their marriage and family.

A woman is always the center of a family. Whether she is a wife of a mother, she is always the person who sacrifices a great deal. Even if maybe she does not need look after her husband and not do housework, it is expected to be her responsibility to give birth to and feed children. Consequently, women are often trapped in their houses. Both in old times or modern days, many literary works, whose theme are about family, center on women who want to run away from their family to seek for self. Those women in want of running away to search for love, or dreams or independence, desire to live a free life without being oppressed.

Whether females choose career or they return to family, they are constantly in a dilemma between family and career, never being able to keep the balance between the two. That is not only what female characters in Celeste Ng's works are facing, but also millions of women in the world are forced to be faced with. At last, they give up their beloved career to return to family, or carry on their career at the expense of losing their family. The dilemma is a common but unsolved phenomenon, which may be beyond literary category and become a kind of philosophical reflection.

5.2 Criticism of Racial Prejudice

Edward W. Soja points out that space, by its very nature, is political and ideological, and is the production of ideologies (121). The society in the 1960s in America was filled with racial prejudice. In Celeste Ng's works, giving detailed description of road and school as space imagery shows what the writer wants to uncover, racial prejudice. In the 1960s in America, bi-racial marriage is illegal in the

most of places. Not being easy to blend in the white world is the most challenge that bi-racial families are faced with. In the novel *Everything I Never Told You*, James who is born in American soil is under great pressure as a Chinese-American. Until he becomes a tenured professor, he has the habit of sitting on the chair unsteadily as if there was someone to drive him away. In America, he does not have a sense of belonging. His marriage with Marilyn also suffers from Mrs. Walker's rejection. What she said-- "it is not right, when you are married, there is no place for your children to live in," left a great impression in his mind, never forgetting. James and his children go through the rejection and loneliness as Chinese-Americans. The great pressure makes their family relationship fragile and easy to collapse.

The only trip that the whole family had was forced to abort, owing to the gaze of passers-by. No matter where they went, they were gazed at and gossiped about. Even there was one person coming near to and asked them whether they were Chinese, pointing his own eyes, signing upward (this is a kind of stereotyped that Chinese people's eyes are different from westerners, Chinese's canthus being upward).

In *Little Fires Everywhere*, Ivvy was forced to stop her classes because she took up the cudgels for the injured party. Her friend, Deja who is a black girl, attended the orchestra fortunately because there were not many black children in the orchestra. Deja was always quiet and shy and had the anxious face of someone expecting the worst. In the practice of violin that day, she was picked on by Mrs. Peters in front of everyone. What's worse, Mrs. Peters' voice shrilled over the single violin, saying: "Did you not understand me? You need me to speak in Ebonics" (Ng, "Little" 77)? Being a teacher, she is supposed to respect her students in spite of their colors or races. But to our disappointment, she is a representative showing her racial prejudice. Deja and her parents suffer from much racial prejudice.

Deja, including her parents were treated unequally on account of being blacks. When her parents turned up for concerts, they often sat in the last row alone and they never chatted with the other parents about skiing or remodeling or plans for spring break. They lived all of Deja's life in a comfortable little house at the south end of Shaker. Some one ever joked Deja had gone from kindergarten all the up to high school without saying

more than ten words a year. (Ng, “Little” 92)

Bebe is a Chinese girl in *Little Fires Everywhere*, who came to America with her boy friend but later was abandoned, making her have to bring up her baby, May Ling Chou by herself. Due to little education and no skills, she suffered from poverty and was forced to leave her baby at the fire station, expecting someone to raise her baby. Later May Ling was adopted by a white couple, who were infertile. Several months later, Bebe found a job and began to recover from depression and she wanted her baby. Then a fight for wanting May Ying between Bebe and the white couple was on. During the period of claiming May Ying, Bebe was nearly silent, never showing her voice although other people in Shaker all spoke their pieces, even children including Ivvy in her teens. Bebe is a Chinese people and a woman. At the same time she is poor and belongs to the disadvantaged group. Her voice is submerged in the main-stream society. From the novel, we can know all the people’s opinions, only without Bebe’s voice. In American world, Bebe loses her right of speech.

In America, white people have a prejudice towards different colors, like black and yellow. Although they advocate that all men are created equal. Fact is not the same as what they say. In the realistic life, different colors are always marginalized.

5.3 Sympathy for Homosexuality

Homosexual movement gives the basis to the appearance of queer family in the 1950s. In the period of MaCarthyism in the USA, the main-stream society was homophobic. In 1969, more than two thousand people participated in “Stonewall Riots”, making it the beginning of homosexual group seeking openly for social identity in the USA (Yan 117). The public’s attitude towards homosexuality a little bit improved in the 1970s, yet quantities of homosexual people were still marginalized. Therefore, at that moment, most of homosexual people chose to be closeted.

Whether Jack in *Everything I Never Told You* or Pauline and Mal in *Little Fires Everywhere*, they concealed their homosexual identity so as not to be discriminated.

Jack was alone most of time, and he did not eat in the school canteen or go to the dances in case other people find him homosexual person. When he had classes, he always sat in the last row. It was universally believed that Jack did not date. There were no dinners out, no flowers, and no boxes of chocolates in cellophane wrap. He simply drove the girl out to the point or the drive-in or a parking out somewhere and spread a blanket across the backseat of his car. He was known to make a specialty of deflowering virgins (Ng, "Everything" 65).

In the spring of that year, he selected Lydia only not to do the same thing to Lydia as other girls. For one thing, because he lost his heart to Nath, who is Lydia's brother, he could not hurt Lydia, thus hurting Nath; for another thing, as a matter of fact, what Jack did to other girls is just to hide his homosexual identity.

Pauline and Mal live together but never tell others their homosexual identity. They enjoy their own career, appreciate arts and help others in need and cook delicious food. In order to hide away their homosexual identity, they also do not dare associate more with others or make more friends.

In the two novels, Celeste Ng satires hypocritical and ruthless American society, and criticizes the main-stream value treating homosexuality as heresy and malady. More importantly, she shapes those homosexual people who are discriminated by the main-stream society as positive images who have affection and faith, like Jack Pauline and Mal. They are full of kindness. Respectively, Jack is ready to help Nath when Nath has some trouble; he also makes Lydia aware of seeking for self. After Marilyn disappeared, Jack tried his best to comfort Nath. He gave candies to make Nath more comfortable.

"Want one?", Jack asked when he reached the steps, nestled in his outstretched palm: a half-dozen red candies, fish-shaped, the size of his thumb. Head to tail, tail to head, they glistened like jewels. Jack grinned and said to Nath, leaning closer to Nath, as if he were telling a secret, "You will be okay, my mom says kids only need one parent. She says if my dad does not care enough to see me, it is his loss, not mine" (Ng, "Everything" 131).

Pauline and Mal are the same case with Jack. They give a helping hand to Mia

when Mia studies at school. After Mia is forced to quit her study, Pauline introduces Mia to an art business woman to help Mia sell her pictures in support of her living.

On the back of one of the pictures that Pauline took for Mia and Pearl, was Pauline's unmistakable signature, and a note, clipped to a business card: Anita will sell these for you when you need money. Send her your work, when you are ready. I've told her to expect you. P. (Ng, "Little" 234)

5.4 Beautiful Blueprint for Communication and Understanding

Space imagery can be concrete or abstract, macroscopic or microscopic as well. What's more, space imagery recurring in the works has its significant purpose--to show what the writer wants to present to us, that is to say the literature word created by the writer. From the two novels, *Everything I Never Told You* and *Little Fires Everywhere*, we can know misunderstanding is generally based on no communication or communicating terribly. These bad side effects demand that we should communicate well with others, thus getting a better understanding of others to make a better world to live in.

Lydia's death can break readers' heart. The first sentence "Lydia is dead, yet they do not know it" (Ng, "Everything" 1), at the beginning of *Everything I Never Told You* gives us a startle. As the story develops, we slowly enter the inner world of the sensitive girl of poor expression. We can comprehend her desire, anxiety and hopelessness. However, in the realistic life, Lydia never expresses herself to others, even to her families, she having everything that she never told others, which weighed her down and finally drew her into the river. Never does she have a chance to enjoy beautiful life, only to go through the burden and despair of life. For her, committing suicide is a kind of great relief. In effect, her death is caused by no communication and terrible understanding.

Misunderstanding is filled here and there. James never told his family his straits. He graduates from the famous university and should have been a professor at Harvard. However owing to being a Chinese-American, he was reduced to teaching in a small

town. He loves his children but cannot show his love properly, putting out Nath's enthusiasm for astronomy and expecting Lydia to make more friends with white students and ignoring Hannah. Marilyn resolves to be a woman doctor. But her dream stops due to her being a mother and wife. She has to spend most of time looking after her children and husband. After her mother's death, Marilyn made up her mind to go on her dream, without saying a word, which caused misunderstanding of her family, James thinking that she regretted having marrying him a Chinese-American, Nath and Lydia thinking that they must have done something wrong to make their mother leave them, which is the just the root cause of Lydia having no safety. Apart from their misunderstanding, Nath and Lydia are both silent. They never show their voices to their family, thus being ignored.

In *Little Fires Everywhere*, Mrs. Richardson admires Mia who is an artist and lives a carefree life at will in the first place. At the same time, Mia in turn wishes Mrs. Richardson to break away from her grand house standing for imprisonment to pursue her dream. Unfortunately, misunderstanding gradually turns up between them, which causes Mia and her daughter Pearl to leave Shaker where they intend to live for a long time.

If they opened up their heart to others and communicated well with one another, misunderstanding would disappear and the ending would be different. Lydia's death and Mia's departure force others to cure them of their pains by means of communication and comforting other family members and going out of their closed world to speak out their voices. This is what Celeste Ng wants to tell us--communication is the best policy.

This chapter deals with Celeste Ng's unique literature world--concern about professional women, criticism of racial prejudice, sympathy for homosexuality as well as beautiful wish for communication and understanding between each other. Chapter six will present significances of the thesis and maybe give some suggestions for future studies on Celeste Ng and her works.

Chapter Six

CONCLUSION

6.1 Significance of This Thesis

Celeste Ng being a rising star among the contemporary Chinese-American female writer, her debut *Everything I Never Told You* and second novel *Little Fires Everywhere* have won many awards and praise since they were published. However, on account of *Everything I Never Told You* coming out in 2014 and *Little Fires Everywhere* in 2017, studies on them are relatively scarce, especially studies on the latter. Consequently, there is much blank waiting for us to fill in.

Since the late 20th century, academic domain has seen a trend towards “space turn”, which was considered as one of the most significant events then. Space imagery that projects subjective emotion, different world values and personal attitudes of the writer recurs frequently in the works and presents “the past” and “the present”, “there” and “here” in front of readers, which breaks time series, and more importantly stresses the effect of space to take on non-linear narrative. In reality, space imagery is a typical technique of special narrative and often applied to plot development, characterization and created literature world by many contemporary writers.

Celeste Ng, whose narrative style is unique, arranges by design a series of space imagery in her two novels, both macroscopic and microscopic space imagery. The space imagery recurring in her works plays a crucially important role in constructing her own literature world. So my thesis is probing into the space imagery in Celeste Ng’s works to conclude her literature world. By means of studying space imagery in

Everything I Never Told You and *Little Fires Everywhere*, we can draw the conclusion as follows.

Macroscopic space imagery which can give an overall keynote of the works, contributes to creating Celeste Ng's Literature world. In *Everything I Never Told You*, misunderstanding is found everywhere in the text. In this bi-cultural family, every family member has his or her own hidden sufferings, which are just everything that they never told others. It is a lack of communication that leads to the tear-jerking tragedy in the biracial family, Lydia being drowned in the river, family relationship being shattered and Nath and Hannah being ignored. Consequently, to reunite their family and maintain the balance, in the end the Lees begin to communicate with others. In *Little Fires Everywhere*, we can find "little fires" run through here and there. They are the seed of life in a mother's womb. In addition, they stand for justice that is always ready to fight against inequalities. What's more, they are "little fires" standing for dreams and freedom. Everyone will struggle for his or her "little fires" in them.

Microscopic space imagery plays a significant part in propelling narrative process and constructing Celeste Ng's literature world as well. Microscopic space imagery consisting of road, house, kitchen, school along with corner also loads diverse connotations. Road leading to the unknown world, can change one's destiny. Marilyn makes up her mind to pursue her dream from Middlewood to Toledo, yet, as a result of Hannah's arrival, she is forced to return to family from Toledo to Middlewood. The road running after dream means nothing for Marilyn. On the contrary, as far as Mia is concerned in *Little Fires Everywhere*, road leading to the distance transforms her destiny, and meanwhile changes the fate of those whom Mia meets all the way too. House and kitchen show different individual states, free or trapped, rebellious or compliant. Marilyn and Mrs. Richardson are imprisoned in the family, not being able to go on their dreams. Mrs. Walker is willing to spend her time cooking in the kitchen. For most of females, they are in the dilemma of a professional woman and a responsible housewife.

School should have been the purest place in the world, there being no racial

separation and discrimination. On the contrary, in Celeste Ng's works, it is a very common phenomenon for black and yellow races to be discriminated in the school. The Lees family is discriminated and Deja, a black girl is given a scorn in the school. It is no wonder that how severe the racialism is in the American world. "Corner people" serve as a kind of foil to the main characters, and make comparison with protagonists. They seem to be in the corner ignored by readers. As a matter of fact, there is something in essence in it only if we readers carefully and deeply ponder. "Corner people" like Jack and Hannah in *Everything I Never Told You* and Pauline and Mal in *Little Fires Everywhere*, are the group of people who Celeste Ng gives more detailed description to show her sympathy for homosexual persons.

Macroscopic space imagery and microscopic space imagery carry some certain connotation, involve in narrative process as well as characterization, and propel plot development, through which Celeste Ng creates her unique literature world. In her literature world, Celeste Ng shows her concern for female living condition. They are constantly being in a dilemma between an independent professional woman and a responsible housewife. Besides, Celeste Ng appeals to respect and understanding of the public to homosexual group, more vitally, a better communication between each other. Meanwhile Ng also criticizes severely racial prejudice in American world.

6.2 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Studies

I analyzes Celeste Ng's unique literature world based on the theoretic framework of space imagery, which can contribute to enriching a little abundance of the studies on Celeste Ng. Yet there are still some limitations that the writer of this thesis has to admit.

First, since Celeste Ng is a new star in literature, her writing skills and habits are not well known by readers. If there are more her works published and more information on her, readers can be have a better understanding of her writing styles so that they can give more comprehensive analysis and comments on her works.

Consequently, the analysis of her literature world in this thesis is just a general idea.

What's more, since her first novel *Everything I Never Told You* was published in 2014, and second novel *Little Fires Everywhere* in 2018, there are not many academic studies on them at home and abroad. It causes many limitations because the writer of this thesis cannot learn much from other ideas in case of the shortcomings of studies. Due to these limitations this thesis possesses, I do hope that the future studies on her works can complement my limitations.

Though there are some limitations in this thesis, the analysis of Celeste Ng's works from the perspective of space imagery is novel. So the writer sincerely hopes that this thesis can shed some fresh light on the study on Celeste Ng and her works, and pave a new way for the future related study.

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