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# Just Like Us: Elizabeth Kendall's Imperfect Quest for Equality

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**Abstract:** This essay analyzes United States academic Elizabeth Kendall's 1913 travelogue *A Wayfarer in China* through the lenses of gender and criticism of imperialism. In China, Kendall sought to transcend social norms while reflecting empathetically, though sometimes contradictorily, on the lives of the people she encountered. In her travelogue, Kendall is exploring China's wild areas but also the metaphysical, untamed space beyond conventions in a quest for gender equality and cultural autonomy. She also defends Chinese immigrants in the US at a time of overwhelming anti-Asian prejudice.

**Keywords:** Kendall (Elizabeth), China, travel literature, women, imperialism, immigration

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First published in 1913, then forgotten, and republished in 2011 (a century after the author's journey), Elizabeth Kendall's (1865–1952) *A Wayfarer in China* has yet to receive scholarly attention placing it within the well-established frameworks of female travel literature and critical study of colonialism through travelogues. Kendall's well-written narrative involves bold forays into remote lands at a crucial moment in China's history (as dynastic rule was drawing to an end) and equally bold statements regarding the cultures that the author encounters. Her perspective is sometimes startlingly contemporary for its critique of cultural domination, including both the presence of the West in China and the Han majority subjugating Tibetans and other indigenous minorities. At other times, Kendall appears to succumb to the dominant racist projections of her time while, in reality, possibly defending the Chinese in the most effective way she can.

Kendall is consistent in her insistence that women equal or exceed men in their ability to endure hardship, navigate the open road of unknown lands, and connect with the locals. This is a perspective common to many female travel writers of previous centuries, as seen in the works of Odette du Puigaudeau, Isabel Eberhardt, Alexandra David-Néel, and many others. Debunking male contemporaries for their clichés about conquering the hostile Other is a prominent feature of female travel literature. It has been demonstrated by Reina Lewis in *Gendering Orientalism* that women's limited access to Western superiority led to alternative and often less degrading representations of racial difference than those produced by their male contemporaries. Nicholas Clifford rejects this notion, however, when analyzing China travelogues of Kendall's contemporaries, including a large number of women (although his book contains only passing references to Kendall, in favor of better-known explorers such as Isabella Bird): He argues that race takes precedence over gender, giving these women the status of "temporary men" (2001, 30). This claim ignores the cultural baggage the female travelers carried with them as a consequence of having been cast in the role of women in their own countries. Even if she could live like a man while traveling, Kendall still received a lifetime of gender-based conditioning, which influenced her viewing of the people she encountered. In her

writings, she is caught precisely in the conflict between what she has experienced and what she believes. She vacillates between imperialist Western cultural conditioning and a universalist stance of embracing the Other as akin to herself.

When Sara Mills describes women's writings as "more tentative than male writing [and] less able to assert the 'truths' of British imperialism" (2003, 3), she suggests that women leaving the beaten path of imposed "femininities" were less on the side of norms, having realized that the interests of their culture's men are not necessarily aligned with their own. Regarding women travelers, Mills writes: "It is in their struggle with the discourses of imperialism and femininity, neither of which they could wholeheartedly adopt, and which pulled them in different textual directions, that their writing exposes the unstable foundations on which it is based" (3). It is through this very instability that *A Wayfarer in China* opens new lanes of enquiry regarding feminism and anti-imperialism in travel literature of the early twentieth century. When faced with Kendall's colorful tales and idiosyncratic observations on culture, race, and gender, a reader must ask why there are so many contradictions in her writing. This article explores them and offers some possible answers within the framework of women travelers' discourse on gender and imperialism.

Kendall was a professor of history and political science at Wellesley College.<sup>1</sup> *A Wayfarer in China*, based on her travels in 1911 across remote areas of Western China, reflects a repeatedly expressed longing to reach "another world" (1913, 233, 247, 303), her ultimate compliment for places of natural beauty: an untamed space beyond restrictive norms, including those based on gender but also those rooted in the normative imperialist ideologies that place Western industrial globalization as a paradigm of progress. In this sense, Kendall was an early detractor of imperialism and a proponent of racial and cultural equality. She was ahead of her time in anticipating postcolonial and global feminism movements for diversity, as well as intersectional striving for gender and race equality. She was traveling at a time when China was in decline, precipitated by unequal treaties, Western military and commercial settlements, and the widespread use of opium following China's defeat against the British in the two Opium Wars (1839–60). Julia Lovell (2014) has demonstrated how crucial this defeat was to the financing of world imperialism through opium sales, and has argued that it is key to understanding China's current rhetoric, policies, and place in the world. Kendall was traveling at an influential moment in Chinese and world history. Phoebe Chow likens the push for free trade with China by Westerners during Kendall's time to a missionary activity due to its zealous ideological underpinnings (2017, 38). Colin Mackerra (2000) has shown how Western images of China have evolved in parallel with political power relations influenced by trade policies, largely as a legacy of the Opium Wars. Given that twentieth-century views on China are markedly different from the Orientalism of the previous centuries, Kendall must be contextualized as traveling through the twilight of modern China. The ambiguities noted above exist not only in her writing but also in China's outlook toward the future at a pivotal moment in the country's history, as well as in the West's attitudes toward China and Chinese immigration. It seems that one of Kendall's goals was to reassure her US readers that the Chinese are not a peril at a time when they were targeted by strict immigration policies and scapegoated when they did reach the US.

Kendall's views on herself as a female traveler reveal a rejection of gender bias. However, it is also important to note that there were a significant number of Western women traveling and writing at her time and during the previous two centuries. A recent article by Carl Thompson (2017) gives an excellent summary, including extensive bibliographical references, of these women's lives, how their work was received at the time, and contemporary scholarship. Throughout over twenty years of rediscovery and revival (through articles, books, reeditions, and anthologies), there remains the unresolved question of the nature and

significance of a possible generalized difference between male-authored and female-authored travelogues. According to Kendall herself, being a woman is actually beneficial in that it marks her as unthreatening to the people she meets and helps her interact with the locals: “It is true, I had some special advantages. I was an American and a woman, and no longer young. Chinese respect for grey hair is a very real thing; a woman is not feared as a man may be, and hostility is often nothing more than fear” (1913, ix). She portrays her own identity with an undercurrent of self-mockery: “I was a ‘scholar,’ a ‘learned lady,’ but what I had come for was not so clear. A missionary I certainly was not. Anyway, as a mere woman I was not likely to do harm” (52). Although she considers femininity an advantage for cross-cultural interactions, she also recognizes that she is going against the social norm, which generally allows freedom and autonomy to men alone (albeit with exceptions for women travel writers in certain circles). She expresses indignation with the men who try to discourage her by giving her bad advice and condescending warnings. In the preface, she states: “Of course I was told not to do it, it would not be safe, but that is what one is always told” (ix). Later, she is more specific in her denunciation: “the enemy was usually a well-bred, intelligent European or American with charming manners and the kindest intentions” (240). She deconstructs the warnings as reflecting irrational biases: “A request for some bit of information so often met with no facts, but simply the stern remark that it was not a thing for a woman to do” (238). In other words, these men do not take into consideration Kendall’s strengths, knowledge, or ambition to explore new places, but rather reduce her to the category of woman, subject to the social norm of remaining in closed spaces or in male company.

### **Freedom from Imposed Alterities**

In an indirect way typical of her narrative voice, Kendall refutes the warning that her dog (whom she brought with her from the United States for company throughout the entire journey) would be harmed by Mongolian dogs: “I knew my dog and he did not” (239). Extending her dog as an analogy for herself, Kendall asserts her own capacities as an individual, against the men who question the prudence of leading an expedition as a woman without white male company. Significantly, she does not encounter any such discouragements while actually traveling (she does sometimes meet Westerners), suggesting that she reaches places where such social norms no longer operate. She is only criticized while in larger cities, preparing her expeditions, and only by her own compatriots or other Westerners. Kendall is freer to pursue her goal of exploration in Chinese rather than Western company (this is largely due to white privilege but not exclusively so: She implies that the cultures she encounters are generally more woman-friendly than her own). Her travels in remote areas of China leave her free from warnings, which she considers irrational, and gender discrimination, which she considers unwarranted (since, according to Kendall, being a woman is an advantage when on an expedition). She is “unsafe” in the company of other Westerners in “civilized” areas, but ontologically safe and free when among native populations (Chinese and minority).<sup>2</sup>

Kendall’s observations on her own experience suggest her awareness of a larger paradigm of male domination. She notes that the warnings she received were not based on any real knowledge of the risks involved, since those who offered them had not experienced the alleged dangers firsthand: “I found, as I had found before, that those who knew the country best were most ready to speed me onward” (ix). This also suggests that the risks themselves were less realities than products of the minds of urban Western men and women who were not explorers. When men do explore, however, Kendall claims that they are less adventurous than women: “Ordinarily the woman, if she has made up her mind to rough it, is far more

indifferent to soft lying and high living, than the man” (127). This observation goes against the stereotype perpetrated by the well-intentioned men who told her that Inner Mongolia, for example, is no place for a lady.

The luxury of solitude in places of natural beauty appears to compensate for the discomforts that Kendall experiences: “The inn at Lu-ku, a rather important little town, was most uncomfortable; but a delightful hour’s rest and quiet on the river bank before entering the town freshened me up so much that the night did not matter” (89). Kendall has made up her mind not to complain; perhaps, as she suggests, this is because she and other women travelers are grateful to escape from oppressive norms and content to draw sustenance from the natural environment wherein there are no social norms at all. Kendall states that avoiding conventional travel (hotels, trains, guidebooks) is part of her plan (236, 290, 301). She specifically chooses little-explored routes, considering but rejecting the more popular paths, so that she “would not need to fear being too comfortable” (237). Comfort equals civilization, whose perks do not compensate for conventions of inequality. Kendall’s descriptions imply that female travelers were more accepting of the rough conditions of remote areas because they had more to gain from leaving the comforts of urban and Western civilization behind. As shown by Mary Russell (1994), this theme is recurring in works of many women travel writers, who contradict stereotypes and insist that their abilities to withstand the ruggedness of the journey are not only equal to but very likely superior to those of men. It could be that Kendall is framing her own experiences to fit her larger case for women’s competence as explorers.

Rejection of human civilization is a recurring theme in *A Wayfarer in China*. Kendall often detours the inn experience; in one instance, she sees a courtyard filled with pigs and insists on sleeping there instead of in her designated room, much to the horror of witnesses (63). There, on her bed in the hay, she enjoys an “unusually pleasant evening” (63). In another place, she “found an open loft which proved very possible after ejecting a few fowls” (94), following her rejection of the best room in the inn because of its offensive smell. Sleeping among animals (or napping by streams and graveyards) is a satisfying, refreshing experience for Kendall, while being confined in human spaces intended for her is often an annoyance that she insists on avoiding, finding her own surprising alternatives. This may be representative of how she perceives and reacts to norms on a larger scale. She insists on finding her own unexpected pathways and is satisfied with them. On another occasion, while waiting for a delayed ship, she lodges in an open shed with horses while others crowd into a waiting room. When she finally reaches her cabin on the ship, which she has to share with another passenger, she longs for her quiet corner in the open shed, remarking: “Civilization has some compensations, but half-civilization is not attractive” (307). Perhaps “civilization” in Kendall’s case would mean having a cabin to herself, while complete lack thereof means being left alone under the open sky. Either way, it means freedom from others (and their gender bias) in the peace and quiet of one’s own thoughts. It seems that the presence of compatriots within “civilization” (including on their way to it) is an annoyance to Kendall, whereas isolated Westerners living in the remote areas are desirable as occasional company. Local people can sometimes further her quest for transcending her society’s norms, though she prefers to maintain a certain distance, at least during the first half of her journey: “If they came too near I laughed and waved them back, and they always complied good-naturedly” (44). The distance Kendall keeps from people suggests an individualistic quest to encounter the Other as an object of her own ideologies. Getting too close might blur the message she is trying to embody, articulate, and portray. In this way, she is like the Orientalist described by Edward Said, for whom the Orient is “a hard-to-reach object” to be interpreted but never really understood for what it is; it is also feminized as a mysterious Other, with metaphors of veiled women standing for an entire civilization: “This cultural, temporal, and

geographical distance was expressed in metaphors of depth, secrecy, and sexual promise” (Said 1978, 222). At the same time, however, as Lewis (1996) has described, women are much less likely to sexualize and racialize a culture than men are. Feminizing a culture does not operate as seamlessly when a person herself has also been subject to the stereotypes of femininity. This is not to deny the existence of white privilege among Western women travelers but only to explain why their regard was often not as objectifying as that of their male counterparts.

Privileged as a Westerner in imperialist times, Kendall utilizes the East to argue in favor of gender equality in a textured variety of ways. Just as she portrays the boldness of women as explorers compared with men, she insists on the ruggedness of the native women she meets. The persona she adopts as a writer (with her imperviousness to discomfort, for example) reflects her gendered agenda to enlarge the boundaries of femaleness and contradict the dominant stereotypes of her own culture. The lens through which she views the local people (albeit from a distance) also suggests that she is using them to portray an expanded view of male and female roles, through insisting on ways in which men and women she encounters do not fit the Western stereotypes (men with long hair and women wearing trousers being her most basic examples). Getting too close to the locals, however, may expose too many flaws in their own culture, not allowing it to fit a tidy image Kendall can use in her feminist quest for individual transcendence, combined with her unconventional (and conflicting) views on equality. Indeed, when she does get close, she betrays some of her professed ideals in a constant tension that is often influenced by the racism of her time, while at other moments her pendulum swings willfully free of them. She benefits from the “flexible positional superiority” described by Said, “which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient, without ever losing him the relative upper hand” (1978, 7). However, being a woman makes her more aware of the condition of otherness than her male counterparts—and perhaps it is the tension between her identification with a “universal” (in reality, white male) perspective, as a writer seeking credibility and readership, and her desire to advocate equality for women and, by extension, greater racial, cultural, and social equality, that accounts for her frequent contradictions.

### **Flowery Kingdoms or Anthill Humanity**

In lieu of human contact, Kendall favors a spiritual connection with the land. This includes wilderness areas but also places where the land has been assiduously modified by human hands. Frequent critical descriptions of the austere accommodation she receives stand in contrast to her idyllic depictions of land wherein nature and human ingenuity coincide: “It was all charming, with the artificial beauty of a carefully ordered park” (156). Similarly: “All this day and the three succeeding ones we were traveling through a district park- or garden-like in its exquisite artificial beauty” (115; see also 22, 50). Highlighting both the aesthetic and functional values of such land, she praises “the garden-like cultivation of the Chinese” (162; see also 136, 169), further observing that “the Chinese has his garden as surely as the Englishman, only he spends his energy in growing things to eat” (260). The land, whether carefully tended or seductively wild, most often is portrayed as pleasant, including “the charm of a dilapidated village set in untidy gardens and groves of fine trees” (175). Her descriptions often verge on utopian, with fields “blossoming like the Garden of Eden” (167) or the writer finding herself in “the loveliest and most fertile spot in the Chinese Eden” (180). The implied comparison is with her own country, which is no longer paradise, having fallen from the divine grace of harmony with nature. Kendall equates paradise with sparsely populated areas with little or no

influence from the West. In such places, she can bond with the land and sometimes its people in a way that furthers her quest to leave civilization (sometimes Western civilization, sometimes any civilization) behind. Her Eden imagery grafts a religious discourse of Christianity onto rural China, and hence, while seeming to commend the Chinese, it also degrades them by incorporating them into a Western framework. China only exists in reference to the West—even as heaven to Western hell, it cannot stand as its own culture. This framing is not, however, used by Kendall for imperialist or even Orientalist purposes but rather to produce a paradigm. As a political scientist, Kendall is interested in what direction the world is moving and searching for ideas on how societies should evolve, which might be applicable to her own country. Thompson brings up a relevant distinction between travel literature's purpose today (escape and entertainment) as opposed to previous centuries, in which it served to reflect upon and provoke debates regarding social, political, and economic issues in the writer's country, as well as about international or global matters (2017, 136). The utopian/dystopian leitmotif espoused by Kendall must be viewed from this angle.

Kendall's utopian élan recalls feminist and other progressive movements in her own country. Feminist utopian novels by authors such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman were being published in the United States at Kendall's time. Gilman's first novel, *Moving the Mountain* (1911), depicted a female explorer in Tibet and made an explicit link between this "primitive" culture and an ideal society to be forged in New York City, particularly with regard to gender equality. Her later and more famous novel *Herland* (1914) also challenged dominant ideas of what is civilized and what is primitive by depicting technological and social innovations perfected by a remote enclave of women. With proto-ecofeminist zeal, Gilman has them working in harmony with nature, shunning personal accumulation of wealth. Like Gilman's, Kendall's utopian descriptions may be designed to entice readers who are already interested in the idea that a better world exists somewhere in the Far East—a mountainous Shangri-la of equality where women hold their own—and spur them into a critical assessment of their own society.

Kendall's satisfying encounters with native people consistently occur in places of natural beauty, assimilating the locals into nature, not culture: "I laughed, and everyone else laughed, and in five minutes I was sitting on the grass under the walnut trees, offerings of flowers and mulberries on my lap, and while the whole population sat around on stone walls and house roofs, the village head man took off my shoes and rubbed my weary feet" (60). These people are not representative of a stifling and gender-biased civilization but rather exist, in Kendall's mind, as extensions of a joyful and fruitful natural landscape. The entire population of a small village is tolerable to Kendall, as long as they retain a childlike or Edenic quality (strewing her lap with fruits and berries and using laughter instead of speech). She also suggests that they are beyond knowledge of and/or shame about sensual pleasures, as the man massages her feet without any apparent awkwardness from anyone, an unlikely situation in her own civilization at the time.

When she arrives in more populous areas, with their indications of Western presence, Kendall's descriptions inverse the utopian motif: "the horrible land was all alive with swarming, toiling, ant-hill humanity. It was a nightmare" (228). This suggests that she is not only critical of the gender bias of Western civilization but also of its imperialist presence. Her own awareness as a woman breaking free in spite of repressive and unjust constraints contributes to her empathy for the Chinese, who are, in contrast to neighboring countries of the time, effectively resisting colonial domination. The last of the Chinese dynasties (the Qing), led by Manchurians and not by the (nonetheless privileged) Han majority, fell later the same year Kendall was traveling (1911), giving way to the Republic of China, which lasted until the Communist revolution of 1949. China under the Qing dynasty controlled a large part of not only what is today Inner Mongolia (still a province of China) but also Outer Mongolia, which gained independence later

in 1911, when Russian-occupied large stretch of Outer Mongolian plains also became independent, together forming the country known as Mongolia today (Sunderland 2004). Of the ethnically Mongolian lands that Kendall was riding across, some were colonized by Russians and some by Chinese. According to Kendall, government did not play a large part in the lives of the people she met, except in the cases of (non-Western) colonialism and (Western) imperialism, both of which she frequently criticized.

### **Siding with the Other**

As a Caucasian woman, Kendall was part of the imperially dominant race yet the nondominant gender. In her travelogue, her personal experience as a woman questioning restrictive gender-based norms also appears to further identification with the native peoples subjected to imperialist presence, as she frequently distances herself from other Caucasians to align with subjugated populations. Her criticisms of Western imperialism can be seen in the utopian/dystopian schema through which she describes China existing for/by itself and China under Western influence. For example, the Great Wall is “a huge protecting arm,” the sight of it flawless until she spots the American Legation below: “clean, comfortable, uncompromising, and alien” (232). Alien to whom? To that particular landscape, to China, to herself: China emerges as a shield against Kendall’s own alienating civilization, a Great Wall separating transcendence from routine conformity to debilitating norms. Here, China’s flaws are due to the West and not to China itself; they are the results of foreign military settlement.

Kendall criticizes imperialism as a hostile form of domination that pretends to be beneficial and amenable: “It is not to be wondered at that the people of Yunnan are alive to the danger of foreign interference, for they see the British on the west and much more the French on the south, peering with greedy eyes and clutching hands over the border.... they have more the aspect of a fortified outpost in a hostile country than the residence of the peaceful representative of a friendly power” (29). This is similar to how she perceives the “well-intentioned” gentlemen who try to interfere with her own autonomous plans. They are ominous, not friendly. China rejecting imperialism is a metaphor for her rejection of male influence in her own life. She frequently expresses her affinities with China and the Chinese, suggesting that the West has a lot to learn from the East and is not learning as much as it should, just as male explorers could learn from women who are more rugged and intrepid than them when facing the perils of travel. Moreover, imparting Western values destroys Chinese manners, which are in fact superior in Kendall’s view: “I have met bad manners in the Flowery Kingdom, but not among the natives” (129). Acknowledging the “rose-colored” image she gives of China, Kendall says this must be excused from someone who during months of traveling “never met anything but courtesy and consideration from all” (321). Her Orientalist longing for an exotic, idealized East is nonetheless tempered by a gender-prescribed assimilation with the Other and balanced by a harsh political criticism of imperialism—rare for her time, and even more so when linked with a critique of gender bias. Alongside her specific denunciations of the Western presence in China, she criticizes imperialism as an institution.

Kendall describes the shops in Chengdu as “truly native undertakings,” which “show what the Chinese can do for themselves,” yet admits that the new commercial arcade has “all the artifice of the West” (175). It seems her feelings are mixed regarding the benefits of imitating the imperial culture, just as she suggests that women do not and should not imitate their male counterparts in exploration. Kendall describes a place she calls Lololand, on the western borders of Szechwan and Yunnan provinces, which is not under Chinese rule



but governed by tribal chiefs. Considered savages by the Han colonists nearby, they nonetheless (or perhaps because of this) earn Kendall's respect. They are darker, taller, and, significantly, "better formed" than the Chinese. Kendall's indirect narrative voice employs physical descriptions to convey value judgements: "Their features are good and they have a frank, direct expression which is very attractive" (76). The women are described as "holding firmly to the feminine petticoats" (76), unlike the trouser-wearing Chinese. The fact that Kendall describes them as having *retained* something that the Chinese have lost ("holding firmly to") implies that progress itself is both undesirable and linked to the dominant population. (Kendall was probably aware, despite her employment of this rhetorical device, that the Han Chinese women were not evolving into trouser wearing and therefore the Lolos could not be said to retain a custom the Han had given up.) Kendall's metonymical narrative strategies serve to draw indigenous women closer to her own culture, bridging the gap between them and herself through symbolic devices such as clothing and physical features. She likens the Lolo women to Italians (thus closer to her own European ancestry) "in feature and color" and describes their dress as "more European than Chinese" (90). Although this would certainly be true of the minority groups in northwestern Xinjiang, her descriptions are applied to members of Tibetan subgroups, who would be unlikely to differ morphologically to a significant extent from Han Chinese. The photographs included by Kendall also do not suggest any such difference.

Although critical of the institution of imperialism as well as Western cultural influences, Kendall does not condemn individuals. She idealizes a group of French nuns passing by, their mere presence making the place "purer and better," and describes the local native women, ethnic minorities, as "alert and intelligent" (142). In this case, women are described along similarly positive lines, regardless of cultural differences between them. Perhaps it is this affinity among women that Kendall is seeking when she dissolves national boundaries. The Mongolian woman is, by Kendall's account, "as much a man as her husband, smoking, riding astride, managing the camel trains with a dexterity equal to his" (261). Kendall is seeking the same universal human identity for herself and for all women. Rejecting both male domination and cultural imperialism, she implies that the West, with its "well-intentioned enemies," has a lot to learn from indigenous nomads. In this way, she takes a position against modernity—another way to reject her own country and the Western imperialism dominant in the world. She does not believe in a linear course of human evolution that equates industrialization with social progress, a belief used to justify Western imperialism. She perceives the natives she encounters throughout her journey as closer to nature and also more egalitarian, especially the non-Han peoples. At times, however, she seems less interested in their realities than in how she can stage them to act out her own convictions. These include an ideological desire for equality between men and women, and possibly between cultures, though this latter point is less easy to act upon, as Kendall seems held back on many occasions by dominant racial prejudices and stereotypes.

### **Contradictions and Credibility**

Kendall seems to be the Jekyll and Hyde of racial equality. Her shifting between ideological personas is most likely due to her inward and outward exploration of how far she can or is willing to go beyond social norms, and possibly of how much she can deviate from them and still be read and respected by her peers. Her troubling contradictions may also explain why she has been given so little scholarly attention. It would be easy, but unfortunate, to dismiss her work as totally unreliable because of its flagrant and radical

inconsistencies. The extent of such contradictions in her work suggests that she herself was torn between conventions and autonomy regarding her views on race and culture.

By the time she reaches Mongolia, Kendall's references to her nameless cohort of servants (guide, translator, carriers) give way to a dichotomy represented by two of them: Wang and Ivan. Their binary colonized/colonizing relationship highlights Kendall's identification with the former and withholding solidarity from the latter.<sup>3</sup> At the time of her travels, Mongolia was colonized by both Russia and China. Kendall considers the Russians to be white like herself, but this does not in any way create feelings of greater proximity. She describes her Russian guide Ivan as "a thoroughly bad sort, lazy, stupid, sullen, and brutal to his horses" (297), which appears to be the only incidence of biting criticism towards an individual throughout her travelogue. Her servants have acquired names now, especially since she has found an excellent Chinese assistant, Wang, in largely Russian-colonized Mongolia. Kendall expresses much fondness for Wang, often citing examples of his competence in contrast with the Russian members of her crew. If she feels more at home among the Chinese, this is certainly an example of such an affinity. She illustrates her preference for Wang in an episode when everyone gets drenched by rain due to the Russians' incompetence, and she is happy to have Wang curl up under her cart in his sheepskin while the Russians can go and sleep on the open ground: "I commit them cheerfully to all the joys of rheumatism" (298). (Although for a contemporary reader it may seem strange that letting a man curl up under her cart can be seen as a gesture of respect and cozy, norm-bending proximity.) The Russians she describes are brutal in their actions, taking over Mongolian land, but friendly to all on an individual level; other whites, whom she calls Anglo-Saxon, are more reserved individually but fairer, Kendall says, in matters of policy.<sup>4</sup> She is eager to criticize the Russians in favor of the Chinese, demonstrating that to her whiteness does not automatically create proximity, while, ironically, one of her harshest judgements is aimed at the Russians' disinterest in racial segregation, a bewildering example of Kendall's many disturbing contradictions. It is all the stranger in that Kendall congratulates herself frequently on eating with locals and using their accommodation where male travelers rely on their own supplies.

Russians are clearly the least favorite among the ethnic groups that Kendall encounters. Nonetheless, she praises a Russian settler who has the pride of "a good New England woman showing her parlour" (283). Arriving at this woman's house after arduous travel with infrequent meals is part of the narrative's utopian-dystopian motif. This angel of the house keeps her abode spotless and her children in perfect discretion, and prepares sumptuous fresh food. She is a paragon of efficiency and cleanliness, from her tidy red bonnet to her floors without a speck of dust, even under the sofa (Kendall checked). Like the "Lolos" who look like Europeans, this frontier woman is likened to someone from Kendall's own region. This persistent need to draw people closer to her, especially those living beyond the pale of dominant conventions, includes but is not limited to minority groups.

Kendall suggests that distinctions between ethnic groups, and how we perceive them, are as superficial as the clothing their members wear. In a candid but somewhat troubling passage, she claims that she cannot assert herself as forcefully as she might wish on the Chinese she encounters in the city, who "looked like Western men" in their dress and can no longer be treated like "beasts of burden" (291).<sup>5</sup> This suggests a more imperialistic attitude than stated in her summary of the relationships she maintains with her servants: "Pay them fairly, treat them considerately, laugh instead of storm at the inevitable mishaps of the way, and generally they will give you faithful, willing service" (43). Kendall frequently contradicts her own statements of racial and cultural egalitarianism, suggesting she is not entirely free from the dominant norms she seeks to escape. This is most explicit in her support for racial segregation in Russian-Chinese interactions, all the

more strange in that she has taken pride in traveling alongside the Chinese, sharing food and lodging with them.

Kendall shows her support for segregationist practices when a Russian asks Wang to have tea with himself and Kendall, and she considers the point in Wang's favor when he refuses: Wang "understood what was suitable better than the Russian" (291) by taking his tea on the other side of the room. Yet it seems that for months she has been eating and drinking with locals, without any mention of racial segregation. In Mongolia, especially, she mixes with the locals in shared mirth: "The Mongols were gay young fellows, taking a kindly interest in my doings. One, the wag of the party, was bent on learning to count in English, and each time he came by me he chanted his lesson over, adding number after number until he reached twenty. The last few miles before getting into camp was the time for a good race" (258). She notes that Mongolians and Chinese are "free from inconvenient prejudices" (279) and thus willing to share her tent and provisions when it is too rainy for them to make a fire and cook their own food. Here, it is significant that Kendall considers gender- and race-based divisions as both inconvenient and prejudiced. She is not, however, consistent in this view insofar as race is concerned. Significantly, it is specifically the contact between two local residents—one white, one nonwhite—that provokes such thoughts in Kendall. Perhaps it is that she does not like to *see* the races mix but implicitly does not consider *herself* as belonging to any race, as part of her general transcendence of the self's fixed identities, in order to move beyond the norms of her civilization. Admittedly, this is a disappointing blind spot in someone who elsewhere takes pride in sharing the company of the Chinese and defends subjugated peoples seemingly out of a sense of justice.

When Kendall witnesses the subjugation of minority populations by the Han Chinese, her affinities usually shift towards the oppressed minority tribes. Observing a deserted outpost, she mentions that the Chinese are constantly expanding further westward, moving on as soon as their hold on a place is assured. She calls it the Chinese "occupation" (114), implying an unjust takeover of land that is not rightfully theirs. This critical terminology, however, is not consistently employed, as on other occasions Kendall uses positive terms such as "achievements": "Those who deny the Chinese all soldierly qualities must have forgotten their achievements against the Tibetans" (126). This passing reference could be an instance of subtle irony, as her more detailed examples consistently side with the colonized. "Achievements" could also be understood as countering the point of view of those Westerners who criticized the Chinese for their lack of bellicosity (with Kendall thus characteristically supporting an underdog, even if at the expense of people with even lower status). Could her remarks be seen as intentionally ironic when she describes the Chinese in racial terms as "blue-gowned men of the ruling race, fairer, smaller, feebler, and yet undoubtedly master" and comments, "It was the triumph of the organizing mind over the brute force of the lower animal" (124)? It is possible that Kendall is not describing what she feels to be true but ironically portraying—even caricaturing—a dominant ethos. It also may be true that she is including dominant stereotypes that she feels will help her gain readership and credibility. One other possibility for such discrepancies in her views on racial equality or integration is that Kendall's views evolved while she was traveling, and that the book, written from her notes and diaries, does not always take her most recent view into account. Most likely, however, she is making a case in favor of the Chinese because they are the ones most in need of positive identification among US readers, in a time of overwhelming prejudices targeting Chinese immigrants.

## A Pro-immigrant Stance

Kendall is aware of the importance of Chinese immigration and the racist attitudes towards the Chinese in the United States. At the time of her travels, the workers and workers' unions were often against immigration, contesting that the Chinese brought wages and benefits down and supposedly took jobs from Americans, while the bosses were in favor of expanding immigrant labor. As is true in today's United States, anti-immigration sentiments often reflect, exacerbate, excuse, or mask racism. Although the country was founded on immigration, certain ethnic groups are labelled "un-American" and scapegoated for the US's problems, whatever they may be at the time. The Chinese immigrants Kendall observed worked in mines, in laundry shops, and on railroads, with conditions that other workers would not accept. There was much racial discrimination in both policies and attitudes towards the Chinese; more so than for any other immigrant group in US history, as historian Erika Lee demonstrates in her book *At America's Gates*. The Anti-Coolie Act of 1862 stipulated a monthly tax specific to the Chinese; the Naturalization Act of 1870 limited citizenship to whites and blacks; the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was a ban on Chinese immigration that lasted until 1943; it also denied citizenship to Chinese already in the US and was the first immigration policy to target a specific ethnic group. Other Asians, such as the Japanese, were not affected by this policy; in fact, they were sought to replace Chinese workers. Only during WWII did policy shift to persecuting the Japanese and granting citizenship and (very limited) immigration quotas to the Chinese.

Although it is difficult to imagine an Asian counterpart of Kendall, a Chinese woman venturing through the wilds of the United States just to see what was there, with a cortege of local servants and guides, Chinese people were an ordinary presence in many parts of the US throughout Kendall's life. The vast majority were men, as it was even more difficult for Chinese women to obtain visas. Boston had a thriving Chinatown, established around 1870. Kendall may have been in the nearby city of Wellesley, Massachusetts in 1903, when 234 Chinese were arrested in Boston's Chinatown for failure to produce their papers during a raid. Although whites and blacks expressed solidarity with the Chinese in the context of the raid, including friends and spouses of the Chinese, this raid occurred in the context of rampant anti-Chinese sentiment. This makes it all the more significant when Kendall feels at home in China and likens the Chinese to herself in particular and to United States Americans in general. (It is also interesting to note that Kendall returned to China in the 1920s to teach at Yenching University [Clifford 2001, xvii], suggesting an ongoing affinity.) She was writing at a time when Chinese were often refused reentry to the United States, even after spending much of their lives in the country, but were also fighting back using the legal system (Lee 2005, 141). This is eerily reminiscent of Donald Trump's recent actions targeting specific immigrant groups, suggesting that the US has always been and remains today a land of immigrants, their defenders, and those who scapegoat them.

Kendall consistently sides with the least industrialized and/or most oppressed ethnic groups, shifting this affinity according to context. The Han Chinese are oppressors with regard to minorities (they comprise the army, which is responsible for occupying minority lands), but are oppressed in the United States. Kendall concludes her account by affirming similarities with the Chinese; a closeness that allows her even to state that she felt "at home" among them (310). This may be an implicit message for her compatriots, during Sinophobic times: If the Chinese are "like us," we should not be singling them out for the strictest immigration policies or conducting police raids into their neighborhoods; if Kendall feels at home among them, Americans should also make them feel at home. In a context that scapegoats "the Chinaman" or "the Coolie" as an exotic and dangerous Other responsible for economic hardships, her observations on how "like us" the Chinese are do not seem superficial. There are, however, many contradictions in Kendall's

outlook, which may be explained by her desire to publish an acceptable travelogue for a public bound by the norms of a specific time and place. Through analysis and contextualization of her arguments, it seems apparent that the writer is trying to do more than gain personal credibility. She seeks to use her voice to defend the Chinese at a time of crisis for this immigrant population in the US. By reassuring her contemporaries that the Chinese are a worthy people not so different from themselves, she is assuaging an overwhelming collective fear (and may in fact be protecting and saving lives). In the context of virulent prejudice resulting in raids, murders, reentry refusals, and property confiscations, her goal may not have been total intellectual lucidity but rather making the Chinese appear likeable and acceptable, even if this means resorting strategically to stereotypes and racism. She assures readers that the Chinese like Wang, who refuses to drink tea with the Russians, will stay safely in their racially determined and circumscribed place. Perhaps this is not what she believes but a compromise that she thinks will be most effective in erasing the Americans' feeling of being threatened by the Chinese. She must choose her transgressions carefully and does not always do so consistently. In her writing, there is, nonetheless, a recurrent identification with the Other and rejection of dominant powers. She makes a bold, egalitarian statement; although it is not formulated consistently, it still holds power and meaning. These inconsistencies may suggest a woman caught between her own overwhelming desire for freedom, her own society's norms, her desire to defend the Chinese from persecution in the US, and incomplete, inchoate views on cultural autonomy.

To further her own positive identification with the Chinese, Kendall likens them to United States Americans. She notes the Chinese love of money and material gain, which she characterizes as equal to that of her own compatriots. Like the Americans of her time, Chinese shun religion and will not bow to religious leaders. They are more interested in "the bread-and-butter, or, more precisely, rice, aspect of life" (311). She also makes some sweeping observations of the forces guiding the world's nations: in America and in Europe, the chief concern is industry, which controls policy. In China, material interests are also the strongest, with merchants as the "strong men" of society, rather than priests (as in India) or soldiers in Japan (312). As Lovell suggests, the marriage of Chinese love of business and Western love of industry is a cornerstone of today's world, lending a prescient tone to Kendall's observations. When Kendall was traveling, much of the world was colonized, divided among European powers, which was justified by racial pretexts. Today it may seem trite for an American to say that the Chinese are "just like us," but at her time, it may have been both intended and received as a radical sociopolitical statement.

## **Conclusion**

Kendall was travelling at a crucial time in China's modern history and seems aware of this in her text, especially since *A Wayfarer in China* was published two years after her voyage, and thus after some key events had already taken place. She mentions China's new experiment in government, founding a republic, and thinks that it will succeed, although she admits this is a totally new concept for China. She presents the Chinese government as almost libertarian in its hands-off approach and the little influence it has on the people: "The tyranny of the majority may exist in China, but it is not exercised through the Government" (313). It is interesting that she chooses a pejorative term to refer to democracy.<sup>6</sup> Again, this could be seen as an implicit criticism of the Western political culture, for which democracy is a founding attribute. Following this logic, Kendall's own society is tyrannical; China may be too, but this is not an institutionalized pattern. Similarly, she states, a Chinese person "is not a government product, nor is he likely to be just yet" (313).

At the same time, the Chinese, according to Kendall, are “democratic” in nature, thereby placing a political cornerstone of the West in an Eastern context and furthering her notion that the Chinese are the most “like us” (and/or have the potential to be).<sup>7</sup> It corresponds to (justifies?) her overall feeling of “at-homeness” in China, and by extension her argument regarding the Americans’ similarities with the group that is most alienated in her own country, which implies the need to improve their situation.

In addition to her plea in favor of the Chinese as model immigrants, Kendall appears to have another (somewhat conflicting) agenda. “Progress” in the forms of imperialist expansion, Western dominance, and even industrial capitalism is not desirable to her on a personal level; she also considers it undesirable for the people who are subjected to these processes and, more generally, as a paradigm for the world’s development. Whether she believes “progress” is on an inevitable, linear course or whether alternatives can exist is not clearly explained. Kendall does, however, suggest that those who are the least “civilized” according to Western or Han Chinese standards are actually more advanced (and also more akin to Westerners). She frequently mentions women and recurrently universalizes their experience by citing them as the representative members of their ethnic group. This hints at some possibility of evolving under a paradigm that reflects virtues and values of traditional indigenous cultures, including women’s voices as well as the new utopian ideologies in the United States at her time.

“Everywhere there is interest, for everywhere there is human nature” (vii); and this human nature, Kendall implies in the book’s last sentence, is much the same the world over.<sup>8</sup> During a cross-cultural encounter, a Western traveler of Kendall’s time could not, perhaps, avoid essentializing the Other. Welcoming Mongolian women into her tent is less a way for Kendall to learn about their lives and more to get beyond the oppressive norms of her own. Yet their proximity reminds her that there is something different in the world from Western civilization, and she is right there in the middle of this deeply foreign culture, transcending conventions and prejudices. Kendall’s travelogue articulates an imperfect but significant statement of racial equality that is rare for her time, and a relentless identification with the Other that implicitly acknowledges the original social paradigm of Othering: of women in a world of male false universals.

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## Notes

1. Wellesley College, one of America’s top liberal arts colleges, is located in the greater Boston area and remains a women’s college today, with notable alumnae such as Hillary Clinton. Its founding goal was to prepare students for “great conflicts, for vast reforms in social life” (Wellesley College 2007). There is little biographical information available about Kendall. She is briefly mentioned in Kuehn 2008 and 2009.

2. “Minority” refers here to ethnic groups indigenous to China but not part of the Han majority. These include the Manchus, who were the ruling dynasty of the time (although the Han were still privileged and culturally dominant). Most minority groups did not fare so well, and there was active conquest (witnessed by Kendall) of their lands and subjugation to Han culture. Tibetans and Mongolians within colonized territories are some, but not all, among the minority groups encountered by Kendall.

3. At the time of Kendall’s travels, Mongolia was fighting for independence from China, which it gained just months later, with the help of Russia. It was a loosely knit territory of fiefdoms, and much of the land, before and after independence, was owned by Russians and Chinese since Mongolians did not traditionally recognize land ownership.

4. For example, “An Englishman or an American would scarcely have asked my boy to sit at table with us, but on the other hand he would have spared the Mongol’s poor little hayfield” (293).

5. As she explains, “nowhere else in my journeyings did I encounter such dawdling and shiftlessness—but there at least you may relieve your feelings by storming a bit and stirring things up; these people, however, looked like Western men, and one simply could not do it” (291).

6. That the majority can act wrongly was recognized as a potential flaw of democracy as far back as the Greeks and the founding of (Western) democracy itself. The term “tyranny of the majority” was coined by John Adams and later used by Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill. It has since been often used as a synonym for democracy when the intent is to criticize it.

7. “And the Chinese is democratic in very much the same way that the American is” (313; see also 203). In addition to the love of freedom, democracy (or egalitarianism) and opportunism seem to be the dominant traits Kendall ascribes to both her own people and those she meets halfway around the world: “the Chinese, in so many things essentially democratic, abases himself before the power of riches as much as the American, and far more than any other Asiatic” (314).

8. The theme of human nature is also prominent in the preface, where Kendall suggests that human nature, everywhere, is essentially good—a belief she shares with the Transcendentalist movement.

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