

The Value of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*—An Ethnocentric Perspective

Xin Yuan

Abstract—*Kim* is the representative novel of Rudyard Kipling, with which he won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1907. The story is about an Anglo-Indian boy Kim who encounters a series of adventures during the pilgrim of looking for the River of Arrow with a Tibetan lama and finally grows to adulthood. In this novel, Kipling vividly depicted the images of the British colonizers and Indians and brought the Anglo-Indian group into the public's sight. Generally, ethnocentrism emphasizes on the group division and advocates the positivity of the in-group and negativity of the out-group. However, descendants of colonizers, like Anglo-Indian, are easily trapped into a go-between identity, thus, forming a faith stuck between ethnocentrism and attachment to the colonized culture, which is different from the ethnocentrism that colonizers usually believe in. Therefore, based on ethnocentrism, this paper aims to discover the ethnocentrism of the protagonist Kim by studying the novel *Kim*. On the one hand, he is ethnocentric about the British national culture, manifested in the superiority of ethnicity and the advocacy of colonization. On the other hand, his ethnocentrism is both complemented and sometimes contradicted by his attachment to the Indian culture, embodied in his gratitude to Indians and profound love to this country.

Index Terms—Kipling, *Kim*, ethnocentrism, British colonizers, Indians.

I. INTRODUCTION

Over two hundred years of British colonization rendered India a deeply affected country by the British Empire in economics, politics, and culture. In the meanwhile, Anglo-Indians, who were the descendants of the British colonizes, were born and lived in India since Queen Elizabeth granted a Charter to the East India Company to initiate trading operations with India in 1600¹.

In the late 19th century, Anglo-Indian writer, Rudyard Kipling became famous for depicting the life of Indians and Indian panorama as the story background. In 1907, he won the Nobel Prize for literature with *Kim* which expressively showed his value towards India and his understanding of the identity of Anglo-Indians.

As one of the representatives of Kipling's literary works,

Kim is controversial because of Kipling's imperialist viewpoint. Today, research on *Kim* not only involves literature but extends to interdisciplinary subjects as well, so the interpretation of *Kim* is varied, including Kim's identity dilemma and Oriental imagery. Ethnocentrism, since it is proposed, mainly focuses on behaviors and attitudes held by two opposite cultural groups. However, the value of the hybrid or people living in the interstitial space immerses in two incompatible cultures and presents another form that is divergent from the orthodox ethnocentrism. Furthermore, the post-colonialism literature promotes the study of discourse and right between the suzerain and the dependency and further explores identity, value, and power of the colonized and the colonizer. Given this, through textual analysis of *Kim*, this paper aims to figure out the features and formation of Kim's unique ethnocentrism which to some extent reflects the value of Anglo-Indians at that time.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1907, Kipling won the Nobel Prize with the novel *Kim*, which brought his literary career to a peak. *Kim* is not only a well-known novel that truly records Indian society at that time but the best interpretation of the Anglo-Indian living condition and social value. Since the 1980s, studies on *Kim* have been springing up and gradually extended to other fields. Some scholars established the relationship between *Kim* and Kipling by integrating Kipling's childhood with the story's plots. Others tried to find out the real identity of Kim which was one of the conflicts appeared in the novel. Also, oriental imagery, like the lama and Indians, was widely studied by reviewers to understand the theme of the novel.

Kim narrates an India-born Irish boy Kimball O'Hara who meets a Tibetan lama in the Lahore City, and they go to an amazing adventure for searching the River of Arrow and participating the Big Game in the British government. By comparing the background of the story with Kipling's childhood, it is obvious that most of the scenes are based on the tales that happened in Kipling's childhood in India, so the protagonist Kim shares a similar childhood with Kipling. Given this, Kim is publicly recognized as Kipling's last autobiographical novel about India. Reviewers think self-revelation is the strongest feature in Kipling's work, as Rubin (1990) said that "Kipling in *Kim* was too reticent to write expressively and directly when the subject was himself" [1]. *Kim* was written in 1901 when Kipling left India for Britain. He knew that he has little chance to return to India, Kipling placed himself in the position of Kim and

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Xin Yuan is with School of Foreign Language for Business, Southwest-ern University of Finance and Economics, Chengdu, 611130 China (e-mail: 554302412@qq.com).

¹ Because the lack of companionship of British women and the monotony and tedium of life in a strange and tropical land, many of British men married Indian women. On 8th April 1687, the Court of Directors of the East India Company officially acknowledged the existence of Anglo-Indian so that the British became responsible for the birth of the Anglo-Indians community.

integrated his feeling and life into the novel. Karim (1978) said: "Perhaps, nowhere else, including *Kim*, has Kipling expressed so sincerely and spontaneously his personal love of India as in His 'Home'" [2].

Furthermore, Kim's identity, bringing great agony and self-question to himself, is one of the highlights of this novel, and even Kim himself keeps looking for the final answer. Studies on his identity focus on his original rootlessness, hybridization and his identity transformation during his growth. Edward Said (1993), in *Culture and Imperialism*, argued that Kim accepted his role as an imperialist and answered the question of his cultural identity in the end [3]. McBratney (2002) saw Kim happily taking up his imperial role as a "new cosmopolitan British citizen" [4]. He stated that Kim became more involved with the Great Game, he has lost his "liminal freedom" and "ethnic flexibility" [4]. However, Swamidoss (2016) opposed Kim's last identity attribution, saying that Kim rapidly shifted in entering and leaving communities, so it was difficult to give Kim a fixed cultural identity [4]. Kim was the third culture individual who lived in the interstitial space, which allowed him to displace in communities but not to any culture. Nonetheless, Baker (2014) stated that the presence of Kim revealed the genetical inferiority of the colonizers because his identity crisis promoted the theme that "no white man can escape his 'white blood', by same token, no native can escape his nativity" [5].

Moreover, since *Kim* embraces a large number of oriental and occidental elements and covers two social groups in India, the religious, political and other social factors that appeared in the novel were thoroughly examined. Hamm (2013) analyzed the relationship between Britain and Russia depicted in the novel, indicating that "these books are characterized by innuendo, exaggeration, generalization, and a demonstrated lack of serious historical analysis" [6]. Kipling, in order to support British imperialist activity, deliberately depicted "India as a dangerous place for Europeans to travel," so *Kim* is a tale of imperialism [6]. Leoshko (2001) reviewed the Tibetan Buddhist in *Kim*, stating that Kipling's use of this Buddhist tradition in the fashioning of the novel is especially revealing about views held at the end of the nineteenth century [7]. Han (2012) also concluded that the lama in *Kim* represented the best Oriental imagery which has been shaped by westerners. In addition, the River of Arrow is regarded as the sign of the wheel of life and the concept of dependent origination that summoned people to re-appreciate the oriental traditions [8].

Besides, as a representative of children's literature, *Kim* attracts attention from reviewers. Musgrave (1981) thought that *Kim* was the masterpiece of Kipling's view of educating children. For example, Kipling viewed that "activity is needed to give direction," so Kim went to St Xavier's school and listened to the sermons of the lama [9]. Musgrave also pointed out that growth into adulthood was the core feature of education around the turn of the century, and *Kim* was a story about a boy's growth [9].

To summarize, previous studies have analyzed *Kim* from various aspects. As an autobiography of Kipling, *Kim* embraces obvious oriental imagery and reflects the author's view of education well, but the identity of Kim is still in dispute. However, as many studies stated, the conflict of

Kim's identity stems from his ambiguity in self-awareness and the influence of the external environment. And this kind of conflict is not merely reflected in his identity definition but in the construction of value as well. Kim's behavior and the reaction from the outside prove that he has a different value from the British and Indians. This study hopes to make a supplement to *Kim*'s research by analyzing Kim's value, especially his ethnocentric concept.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

American sociologist Sumner (1906) offered the following definition of ethnocentrism: "the technical name for the view of things in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it" [10]. Ethnocentrism later generalizes as a positive orientation toward those sharing the same ethnicity and a negative one toward others. According to Sumner's description of ethnocentrists, their attitude and behavior mainly include three elements: placing one's group at the center of everything; judging one's group to be superior to others; holding outsiders in contempt [11]. Therefore, ethnocentrism is also a matter of holding discriminatory attitudes and behaviors: seeing one's own group superior and virtuous, one's own culture is the standard of value and out-group as inferior [11], [12].

Furthermore, in ethnocentrism, group boundary is a sign to divide the in-group and out-group, and attitude and behavior present accordingly. Hales and Edmonds (2019) claimed that cultural identity is generated by the distinction of the population within which people need positive value and norm to enrich self-association, then forming in-group favoritism and out-group derogation [13]. In-group favoritism is featured as superiority, purity of ethnicity, group preference, group cohesion, individual devotion. On the contrary, out-group derogation is basically considered as offensive group protection or affirmation, negative emotions towards the out-group and exploitation or colonization over other nations.

In terms of the degree of ethnocentrism, LeVine and Campbell (1972) pointed that the isolated community and the society which has few contacts with other cultures perform particularly severe ethnocentrism. Hence, more connections with the out-group mean less comparative judgment on unfamiliar cultural groups [14]. However, as mentioned earlier, Anglo-Indians have a vague definition of the group but close relationships with both the British and local Indians, their ethnocentrism is presented in another form. From the perspective of in-group favoritism and out-group derogation, this paper analyzes the similarities and differences between Kim's ethnocentrism and the British colonizers' ethnocentrism and discovers the characteristics of Kim's ethnocentrism.

IV. EVOLUTION OF KIM'S ETHNOCENTRISM

The novel *Kim* is about an Anglo-Indian orphan Kim and a Tibetan lama who wants to seek for the River of Arrow which can wash sins away. On their pilgrimage, Kim accidentally meets the Mavericks, a British troop which his

father once served. By chance, Kim is trained as a chain-man by the British colonizers to gather intelligence for the British government. To accomplish the adventure with the lama and the intelligence work, Kim actively integrates with local Indians.

A. The First Stage—Innocence

The first stage of Kim's ethnocentrism is muddled and inconspicuous because of his identity as a freeman in a carefree childhood. But his father's longing for the purity of ethnic origin has a potential impact on Kim.

At the beginning of the story, Kim is regarded as "poor white of the very poorest" ([15], p. 31) in India and nobody treats him as a high-class British, even though he is the son of an Irish soldier. Because of the early death of his parents, he has never been to school but idles about streets and plays with local Indian children. He is well versed with "the wonderful walled city of Lahore from the Delhi Gate to the outer Fort Ditch" ([15], p. 32), and can easily get along with all kinds of people he meets in the Lahore City. Almost ten years spent with the locals and the lack of discipline, he speaks "the vernacular by preference, and his mother-tongue in a clipped uncertain sing-song" ([15], p. 32). And, he is used to wearing and treasuring Indian dresses rather than European ones, as stated in the book, "one of the young men of fashion had once given Kim a complete suite of Hindu kit, the costume of a low-caste street boy, and Kim stored it in a secret place under some baulks in Nila Ram's timber yard" ([15], p. 33). Apart from personal experience, his behaviors also run against his identity. One significant aspect is that he crawls up a water pipeline for the sights and sounds of women's world at night and eats from the same dishes with begging holy-man when no one is by. Everything Kim does is incompatible with decent British so that he is widely treated in the lowest class by Indians without any respect. It can be seen that he has no in-depth understanding of identity but integrates himself well with Indians, and his identity doesn't bring any privilege or respect he deserves but makes him as *Friend of all the World*.

However, little Kim's white man mark is attached great significance to his father. His father sews three important papers, including "ne-varietur," "clearance-certificate" and "Kim's birth certificate" into an amulet-case which "would yet make little Kimball a man" ([15], p. 35), and "on no account was Kim to prat with them" ([15], p. 35) for they can prove Kim's identity and make Kim be looked after by the British after his death. Also, he firmly believes that one day Kim ought to be found by British soldiers, saying that "the Colonel himself, riding on a horse, at the head of the finest Regiment in the world. would attend to Kim- little Kim that should have been better off than his father" ([15], p. 36). For his father, the white identity is one of the sources of Kim's glory, ensuring Kim to live better with the British. When his father dies, a half-caste woman adopts Kim. She "insisted with tears that he should wear European clothes-trousers, a shirt and a battered hat" ([15], p. 42), and repeats the words said by Kim's father that Kim will be a great Sahib in "one day there will come for you a great Red Bull on a green field, and the Colonel riding on his tall horse, and nine hundred devils" ([15], p. 42). Kim's father, even

that woman overemphasize the peculiarity and benefit of Kim's ethnicity and strive to prove and maintain his ethnicity through various methods. Their behaviors reveal an obvious ethnocentric idea, that is, pursuit the purity of ethnic origin. On the contrary, though little Kim remembers the prophecy of Red Bull, he looks it as a work of magic. So he is not connected with the British for he thinks that "he did nothing with an immense success yet" ([15], p. 40). This is evident in the plot of "as he reached the years of indiscretion, he learned to avoid missionaries and white men of serious aspect who asked who he was, and what he did" ([15], p. 40).

Being influenced by his father, Kim learns the significance of his identity and is willing to pursue his ethnicity when he is prepared, but he doesn't construct his value or constrain behavior like a real white man. His understanding of ethnocentrism in the early years is vague and insignificant in this stage.

B. The Second Stage—Confidence

Different from innocent ethnocentrism in his childhood, Kim's ethnocentrism develops rapidly in the second stage. On the one hand, he is more confident under the guidance of the British colonizers; on the other hand, his ethnocentrism shows a strong in-group preference with the British ideology penetration, including the superiority of his British ethnicity and the rationality of British colonization.

As a disciple of the lama, Kim accompanies the lama to the pilgrimage of the River of Arrow, and he is looking for his father's "Red Bull Prophecy." During the course, Kim's value changes until he gains an identity as a chain-man of the British government.

Several days after leaving the Lahore City, Kim meets the Mavericks in the suburb of a small village. To investigate the name of the troop, Kim sneaked into the camp, but is discovered by a British soldier and sent to Creighton Colonel who is the head of the Mavericks. In the Mavericks, Kim feels a sense of belonging because people all know his father and regard Kim as one of them. Until then, Kim believes the truth of his father's prophecy and realizes the difference of his identity from Indians. He thinks this adventure is a stupendous lark as his life changes dramatically since then. After living in the camp for one night, he talks a lot with soldiers and observes their reactions to this unexpected guest because he desires for the attention from the British colonizers, even the recognition on his identity. Kim wants to become a Sahib².

After Kim meets the Mavericks and builds a relationship with the British, his life is dominated by Father Victor and Creighton Colonel who greatly influence Kim's value in identity construction and psychological growth.

In the novel, Creighton Colonel and Father Victor represent respectively the powerful administration and the British religion in the novel. Father Victor, the first person who finds out Kim's white identity, reminds the British to take care of Kim out of the Masonic obligation. He symbolizes the conservative concept that the British usually advocate, so he is eager to eliminate the Indian influence on

² An official title or honorific address of the British colonizers that was called by Indians.

Kim and directly transform Kim into an orthodox British man. He plans Kim's future in a short time after he meets Kim for the first time: "You will be sent to a school. Later on, we shall see. Kimball, I suppose you'd like to be a soldier" ([15], p. 107). Apparently, for Father Victor, Kim is destined to be a colonial administrator due to his white identity. Before Kim goes to school, he scolds Kim that: "I've given you a notion of religious matters — at least I hope so — and you'll remember, when they ask you your religion, that you're a Cath'lic" ([15], p. 128). The reason he says that is because Roman Catholic is a notable mark to distinguish the British from the locals who believe in Hinduism or Buddhism, and also the standard to identify the British as the first-class citizens because the British believe that their religion is the superior one. In a word, Father Victor recalls Kim's consciousness of identity difference and responsibility as a colonizer.

Different from the identity transformation done by Father Victor, Creighton Colonel's influence on Kim lies in value and manner guidance. The Colonel thinks highly of Kim for his adventurous spirit and rich experience in India, therefore, intending to cultivate Kim as an excellent spy. When Kim goes to school, the Colonel admonishes him the quality that a Sahib should possess:

Thou art a Sahib and the son of a Sahib. Therefore, do not at any time be led to condemn the black men. I have known boys newly entered into the service of the Government who feigned not to understand the talk or the customs of black men ([15], p. 129).

Although the Colonel warns Kim not to discriminate against Indians like other British do, but he repeatedly calls Indians as "black men." The dissonance between his words and deeds reveals that he believes the ethnic superiority of the British and inferiority of Indians. Afterwards, Kim gradually becomes accustomed to applying the white man's value to restrain his behavior. For example, Kim is taught that: "They say at Nucklao that no Sahib must tell a black man that he had made a fault" ([15], p. 142). Kim follows the rule that the British colonizers are the truth even though they make a mistake, which indicates that the British enjoy the supreme discourse right in India.

In addition to the influence of the above two men, Kim's ethnocentrism is also attributed to the recognition of the white man role. For one thing, he accepts his future of being a Sahib, for instance, strives to acquire the knowledge necessary for a Sahib. For another, he despises the former self and constrains his behaviors according to the British norm.

I have learned to read and to write English a little at the madrissah. I shall soon be altogether a Sahib...I was very young, and a fool to boot, when I took Mahbub's message to Umballa. Even when I was with that white regiment I was very young and small and had no wisdom. But now I learn every day, and in three years the Colonel will take me out of the madrissah and let me go upon the road with Mahbub hunting for horses' pedigrees... ([15], p. 144)

Obviously, Kim's confidence of white identity greatly increases, and the external education and identity transformation as a spy make him commit to the British colonization and the British ethnocentrism.

C. The Third Stage—Enlightenment

After graduation, in order to gather intelligence, Kim returns to the Indian community and continues to look for the River of Arrow with the lama, which implies that Kim, as a Sahib, resumes the connection with India and observes India from the perspective of a Sahib. However, in-depth contact with Indians reminds Kim of his childhood and causes him anxiously to re-question the real identity. When Kim is alone, he mutters "who is Kim-Kim-Kim?" ([15], p. 110), and meditates that: "in all India is no one so alone as I! If I die today, who shall bring the news -- and to whom? If I live and God is good, there will be a price upon my head, for I am a son of the Charm — I, Kim" ([15], p. 110). On the one hand, Kim has identified himself with the British ideology; on the other hand, the Indian culture has left an inedible mark on him. The dual influences make him lose direction and become suspicious of himself.

To relieve identity anxiety, Kim looks for answers from others. He asks Mahbub³ "What am I? Mussalman, Hindu, Jain, or Buddhist? That is a hard knot" ([15], p. 149). "Thou art beyond question an unbeliever, and therefore thou wilt be damned. So says my Law -- or I think it does. But thou art also my Little Friend of all the World, and I love thee" ([15], p. 149). However, even intimate Mahbub does not give a definite answer to him. In behavior, Kim's dilemma lies that he cannot integrate British education with Indian customs. Psychologically, he agrees with the British ethnocentrism but keeps a close attachment with India, thus, falling into the gap between two cultures.

Kim's attachment with India is manifested in the admiration for the Indian environment and the deep affection to the locals. In the pilgrimage, to help the British spy on the news of the rebellion between the Indian King and Russians, Kim and the lama go to snow mountains. Kim perceives the latent beauty of India and depicts the snow mountains as follow:

Above them, in scarps and blocks upheaved, the rocks strove to fight their heads above the white smother. Above these again, changeless since the world's beginning, but changing to every mood of sun and cloud, lay out the eternal snow ([15], p. 225).

Seeing such magnificent scenery, Kim says: "surly the Gods live here!" ([15], p. 225) Kim is amazed at the natural scenery and shows his fondness to Indian nature. Besides, in the long-term connection with Indians, Kim finds the kind and unsophisticated qualities of them. When Kim is injured in a fight with Russian spies, a hill woman named "the Woman of Shamlegh" provides food and therapy to him. When they go back to the plains, a formerly known old Indian woman shoulders the responsibility of curing him. To not disturb Kim's recovery, she even dispatches guarders to protect Kim. The old Indian woman says "looked upon him as her son... I only wished to see that the boy had come to no harm and was a free agent. As thou knowest, he and I were old friends in the first days of the pilgrimage" ([15], p. 257). Although Kim has become a

³ An Afghan horse trader who works for the British government as a spy.

Sahib, Indians still treat him genuinely and kindly and never put him in the opposite party. Their love and friendliness impress Kim and strengthen his association and gratitude to entire India.

At the end of the novel, bearing the good feeling to India, Kim frees from the identity anxiety and stereotyped ethnocentrism taught by the British and establishes his own ethnocentrism. He acknowledges not only his sense of superiority due to the innate white identity but also his passion for India where he is raised up.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the theory of ethnocentrism, this paper discovers Kim's ethnocentrism through the analysis of the novel *Kim*. It is found that while Kim embraces the superiority of the Britain culture and advocates colonization in India, he also expresses love and recognition to the India culture and identifies the beauty of Indians.

The formation of Kim's complicated ethnocentrism can be divided into three stages. First of all, though people around Kim instill the British ethnocentrism, little Kim does not perceive the peculiarity of his white identity, therefore, the influence on Kim is not significant. Secondly, Kim appeals to the sense of belonging and recognition from the British. Under the guidance of the British colonizers, he understands the superiority of his ethnicity and justifies the British colonization in India. Lastly, the long-term life experience in India and the inextricable relationship with India determine that Kim is unable to wash the Indian mark away. When Kim re-connect with India, he expresses his affection and appreciation for this land. In the end, Kim doesn't negate the culture of either side but stands in an interstitial space that allows two values co-exist in his mind.

Although the present study has some possible implications, it still has many limitations. Kim's ethnocentrism is the product of the colonial rule, so it can only be exemplified in some special communities which have a similar experience with Kim. It is worthwhile extending Kim's ethnocentrism to the entire Anglo-Indian group and analyzing reasons for their ethnocentrism.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

This paper is not carried out with a conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

First author Xin Yuan conducted the research, analyzed the novel and wrote the paper.

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Xin Yuan, Chengdu, born on 1996-1-3. The author is now a first-year graduate, studying in Business English Studies at School of Foreign Language for Business, Southwestern University of Finance and Economics, Chengdu, China.

She has no work experience but pursues her master degree after obtaining the undergraduate degree. She has not published any works yet. Her current research interest is intercultural business

communication and intercultural adaptation.

Ms. Yuan is rewarded as an excellent graduate of Southwestern University of Finance and Economics in 2019.