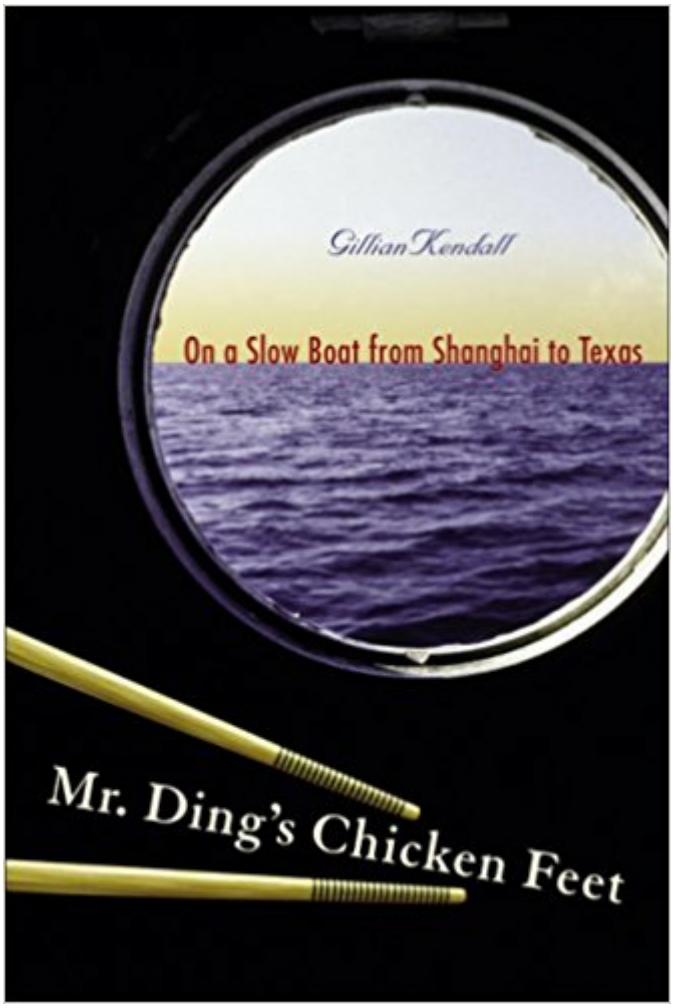
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Mr. Ding's Chicken Feet: On A Slow Boat From Shanghai To Texas



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Synopsis

After accepting a job teaching English on a small engineering vessel traveling from Shanghai to Texas, Gillian Kendall embarks on a strange journey with no ports of call but exotic emotional landscapes. She is the only female aboard, surrounded by Chinese men. The cosmopolitan graduate student suddenly has to adjust to an alien world, thick with cigarette smoke, unusual sea creatures, and male sexuality. Kendall invites readers to travel with her across cultural divides as deep and mysterious as the Pacific while she explores her own culture, orientation, and heart.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

There’s a lot of potential in the story of a young American woman hired onto a Chinese vessel to teach the sailors English as they cross the Pacific, and Kendall, a freelance writer who lives in Australia, hits it from time to time in this swift and eventful memoir of her weeks at sea as "Teach-ah." The setting is ripe for misunderstandings, loneliness, bonding and self-reflection. As her students’ English improves and Kendall’s Chinese and "Chinglish" develops, she befriends some of the men on board, attempts to sort out a series of cultural faux pas and thinks about her doomed relationship with her boyfriend back home. She hints at the deeper issues that influence her, most especially her nascent homosexuality, but only with glancing strokes that leave much unexplored and the relationship between the reader and writer stymied. The fun, however, is in the stories of the daily navigation of tight quarters, cultural collisions and stormsÃ¢â ¬â •and the cigarettes, sweets and chicken feet that get them all through the long days and nights of sea and sky. (Oct. 3)

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Hold on to your seat as you travel with cosmopolitan English graduate student Kendall, the sole woman aboard a Chinese ship. Kendall’s adventure begins with a flier and a help-wanted ad: "English as a Second Language (ESL) Teacher Needed." Intrigued, she answers the ad and soon finds herself accompanying a cruise from Shanghai to Galveston, Texas, teaching ESL en route to Chinese seamen, ship’s officers, and mechanical engineers. And that’s just the beginning! English lessons, of course, are only part of the story. The fundamentals of intercultural communication are at the heart of this fast-paced journey. Self-discovery is also central. Readers will learn about the Chinese system of manners, dietary customs, ships’ rolls, seasickness, student-teacher relations, and hunger for knowledge. Time zones will be crossed, and the ocean will not always look the same. This is enjoyable through and through. Sarah WatsteinCopyright Ã Â© American Library Association. All rights reserved

I highly recommend this fast paced exciting read. A substantive story full of twists and turns with insight into the Chinese culture and life on a boat as the only woman. Laugh out loud moments with sensitive emotional highs and lows. Educational, poignant, and an enjoyable journey. Could not put it down.

Everyone loves an adventure (or at least reading of one) and most of us will never take a boat from China to America. Envious of this one, I curled up by my fireplace and read Mr. Ding’s Chicken Feet with a taste for the fascinating journey of a Caucasian woman on a boat full of Asian men. I was not disappointed.The author sets sail on an ocean of cultural difference and wins over the hearts of the crew - a rough and salty bunch who sit spellbound by her in English class.Because of the obvious vast expanse of ocean to cross, you know that the author is going to have to face a few things she has probably never had to before, and deal with them. There is, after all, no escape on a small boat in the middle of the ocean.Kendall reveals the color of the crew over the course of the journey as if she were polishing up tarnished brass. It was great fun to read about the men as they blossom at the hand of their teacher...though the revelations were not one-sided.Not surprisingly, I felt the poignancy at the sight of land, which meant having to say goodbye.Kendall writes with an unpretentious clarity, humor and heart. I definitely recommend it.

It is a very fast reading book. It never drags. She is a gifted writer in that she holds your interest.I recommend it to all. Very funny in spots.

In Mr Ding's Chicken Feet, the author, Gillian Kendall, comes across at first as maybe a little naive and unwary. She is a risk-taker. Her apparent lack of serious doubt about the whole enterprise, her trust in her fellow human beings not to harm her and her faith that it would all work out made me a little nervous on her behalf. But she is vindicated by the experience and it is her empathy and geniality that are the keys to her success. Observing Kendall's openness to life and her willingness to reach out across cultures became one of the pleasures of reading the book. A cynical reader such as I am found it instructive to watch her interest in humanity unfold and be repaid. Her story really takes off once the ship leaves shore. Then it leaves behind any experience I and probably most readers have had. Shipboard life with a completely male crew who mostly speak very fractured English seems so weird and challenging that you half expect the book to be a story of failure -- perhaps noble failure but depressing nonetheless. So it's very satisfying that she actually makes a difference to the sailors' English and lives. She is inventive in her methods and determined to give her employers their money's worth and thereby wins the crew's respect and affection. Kendall can write -- just see her description of the terrible storm at sea. It had me rigid with tension. Shades of Conrad in Typhoon. She has a distinctive and likable tone of voice. The book tells an optimistic story in an unpretentious way and gives you faith in the power of empathic teachers (and English!).

I spent the academic year of 1999/2000 teaching English in Shenzhen. I spoke no Chinese, at the time, and had no formal teaching experience. So I could definitely relate to Gillian's frustrations, culture shock, and malentendus. It's 1991 and Gillian is a grad student in Galveston, TX. The semester is coming to a close and she spies an ad on the bulletin board for an ESL teacher aboard a ship sailing from Shanghai to Galveston. After a hard sell Gillian manages to land the job aboard the all male ship. The company flies her to Shanghai where she boards the ship. The reader witnesses her feelings about being the only woman on the ship; loneliness and some sexual harassment egged on by the only other American on board. She experiences a Sapphic awakening as she realizes in her state of isolation that she doesn't have any romantic feelings for her boyfriend. She manages to break through the cultural, gender, and language barriers to form some attachments to her students and especially Mr. Ding, the cook. The book is riddled with faux pas but the funniest part, I would say, is when she saves Mr. Ding by hurling the violent Panamanian vendor into the Canal.

I have read some of Gillian Kendall's travel stories and she has an eye for the telling detail.

Although this book is more memoir than travel commentary, she manages to include enough background to set the scene for this genuinely funny page turner. Kendall finds herself signed up to teach English as a Second Language to an all-male crew of Chinese seamen, with her only non-crew companion an ex-jock from Texas on board as a technical adviser. The book recounts her voyage not only from China to the U.S. but from initial apprehension and self doubt to the sure knowledge that she has not only taught a good number of her pupils to make themselves understood in English, she has also become something of a hero to them -- and not only because of her teaching. I laughed out loud more than once and admired her apparent conquest of an improbably dificult task. Inventive teaching methods, respect for each other's culture (except perhaps for chicken feet on the menu or the reported promiscuity of American women) and genuine curiosity and humanity made this a journey I felt must have been pivotal to both crewnmen and author. There is a subplot of Kendall's indecision about her love life back in Texas, and actually, her love life in general. If I have a criticism, it is that the reader never finds out how that aspect all worked out. But that's fodder for another book from this talented author. I can't wait.

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