



FILM: **CRAZY RICH ASIANS**

FDG RATING: 3.4 

Jon M Chu: *director, writer*
Constance Wu: *actress, Rachel Chu*
Henry Golding: *actor, Nick Young*

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DISCUSSION SUMMARY: **CRAZY RICH ASIANS**

Many of us were hesitant to see a romantic comedy about extremely rich Asians, assuming the content would be superficial with materialistic characters, but since the film received many positive reviews and the film maker is local, we selected it for our September film discussion. Others agreed watching anything light and playful would be welcome escape from the constant barrage of news.

We meet the very cute couple, Rachel Chu and longtime boyfriend, Nick Young, both economics professors at NYU, as they board a flight to his home in Singapore for his best friend's wedding, which of course, includes meeting Nick's parents. Rachel is shocked as they are ushered into first class seats. Nick explains his family does business with the airlines. It's the first clue that the guy who plays basketball at the YMCA and uses her Netflix account rather than get his own, may be more than meets the eye. For some reason, Rachel never did a google search of her boyfriend's name, or she would have learned that his family is one of the wealthiest in Singapore. We tag along as Rachel (raised by her lower middle class, immigrant, single mother in Cupertino, California) sees the extravagance emerge.

The story is pretty formulaic, based on the novel of the same name. Rachel is put to the test by Nick's disapproving mother, contends with jealous socialites (a photo of the mystery girl with the rich eligible bachelor goes viral), retreats to the warmth, and strength of her own mother, has the support of her very funny college BFF who lives in Singapore, and eventually all ends well. Along the way, we meet quirky, stereotypical characters and see their opulent mansion-palaces and lavish lifestyles. Discussion participants who had read the book noted that the novel was shallow and the film followed suit.

Film discussion participants, who had lived in Singapore, said the story would have been more interesting to show the contrast of different cultures living in Singapore rather than solely focus on this one element noting there are also wealthy Indians. We really didn't learn about Singapore culture; the story could have just as easily been about an extremely wealthy family in America. Except for the mahjong showdown between Rachel and Nick's mother, Eleanor, which actually was not in the novel, but was one of the most interesting, pivotal scenes. We wondered about the significance of the tiles in Rachel's hand because we could tell she was making specific strategic moves. Here is the official explanation from the director:

"The film is really Rachel's journey of going to Asia and finding the dragon within, and becoming stronger and more self-assured in her own identity," Chu continues. "The mahjong scene is the moment when the dragon finally comes out." As Rachel picks up the tile that both she and Eleanor need in order to win, she reveals: "Nick proposed to me yesterday. He said he'd walk away from his family and you for good. But don't worry, I turned him down." Rachel discards the tile, choosing not to play it, allowing Eleanor to win and walks away from the table revealing her tiles, showing that she actually had the winning hand. It is the decisive moment that Rachel comes to terms with her own dual culture identity and it is the moment that Nick's mother comes to terms with Rachel's relationship with her son. In that respect, Rachel wins after all.' The director purposely used the fast, sharp clicking sound of the ivory mahjong tiles as they hit each other to mimic a fighting scene such as a sword fight.

Some of us were turned off by the gross glorification of capitalism. Others were uncomfortable with the cartoonish stereotypes. We agreed the opening scene was definitely one of the most memorable in the film: In 1995, a rain-drenched Asian family, laden with suitcases (Eleanor Young, her son Nick, sister in law, and niece) arrive in late evening at a posh London hotel with a reservation, only to be told condescendingly by the receptionists that the room she booked is not available and to try Chinatown for accommodations. When Eleanor asks to use the phone, she is told there is a payphone across the street. She soon returns, after calling her husband. The hotel owner appears -- the tune has changed. Eleanor is greeted by the owner in the lobby and introduced to the staff: she is the new owner of the hotel.

We loved the casting: Constance Wu as Rachel, Henry Golding as Nick. Awkwafina as Rachel's BFF Peik Lin Goh was hysterical. And of course Michelle Yeoh as Eleanor, who one resident reviewer noted was a terrific villain. Evidently, the last mainstream all Asian cast film was in 1993, 25 years ago, The Joy Luck Club. All in all, Crazy Rich Asians was an entertaining, glitzy romantic comedy, not ambitious, but fun to watch resulting in a relatively not-so-crazy score of 3.4 on our scale of 1 to 5. (5 is the best.)



See you at the movies!

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