

CRAZY RICH ASIANS (2018)

- August 15th, 2018
- 2 hrs
- \$30 million (estimated)
- Directed by Jon M. Chu
- Written by Peter Chiarelli, Adele Lim, Kevin Kwan (Book)
- Production company: Color Force, SK Global, Warner Bros.
- Rated PG-13 for some suggestive content and language

QUICK THOUGHTS

- Marisa Serafini
- Rick Hong
- Nino Llanera

DEVELOPMENT

- With more than one million copies in print worldwide, the book has never left the best seller lists in Singapore, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia. “Rich People Problems” debuted on the New York Times Bestseller List upon its release in 2017.
- 25 years since a major Hollywood studio featuring Asian-Americans in lead roles- “The Joy Luck Club,” which was released in 1993.
- The new film's creators turned down a "gigantic payday" at Netflix to ensure the first Asian-American-focused studio movie in 25 years would be seen in theaters and, if all goes well, reshape the Hollywood landscape: "The biggest stage with the biggest stakes — that's what we asked for."
- Nina Jacobson said that when she and her Color Force partner Brad Simpson (“The Hunger Games”) read Kwan’s manuscript, they knew it had to be a movie.
- They knew that the film would likely never survive the studio development process, however, and decided to have a vision, a script and a budget to sell as a package before going to the marketplace.
- Ivanhoe Pictures’ John Penotti signed on to help and Warner Bros. would ultimately join to partner with them to release the film.
- While Kwan had lucrative offers, he optioned his book to Color Force and Ivanhoe for just \$1 (with triggers in place for him to earn more as the project got made) in exchange for the right to remain involved with development decisions — a rare opportunity for a first-timer. "To say, 'I'm going to do this for a dollar,'" says Simpson, "the only other person I know who does that is Stephen King."
- Kwan, who also executive produced the film, said he didn’t want to rush a movie adaptation after the first book was published in 2009. “We really were purposeful about this,” Kwan said. “We knew we wanted to take our time. We knew we wanted to give the screenwriter time to really get to the heart of the story and really transform it in a meaningful way and we then wanted to wait for the amazing cast to happen...It all came together perfectly.”
- “We always felt huge pressure that Asian and Asian-American actors in Hollywood movies are one of the most underrepresented, one of the most invisible and narrowly defined groups,” she said. “Maybe you get to be a certain kind of character, but you don’t get the full range of human personality and emotion offered to you.” -Producer Nina Jacobson

WRITING (Peter Chiarelli, Adele Lim, Kevin Kwan (Book))

- Malaysian-born TV writer Adele Lim, who worked with Chu to incorporate not just more cultural specificity into Chiarelli's script, but also emotional authenticity.
- **BOOK DIFFERENCES:**
 - The 546-page book goes into detail about the three interconnected (and immensely wealthy) families — the Youngs, the Shangs and the T'siens — and switches viewpoints between five main characters.
 - The book Youngs, on the other hand, go out of their way to fly below the radar. You really get an idea of how, well, crazy-rich and aristocratic the family is when you realize how a real-estate tycoon family like the Gohs has never even heard of Tyersall Park, the vast estate belonging to Nick's grandmother.
 - "Many of the wealthiest people here make an effort not to stand out, and most of the time, you would never know you were standing next to a billionaire," Goh Peik Lin explains to Rachel in the book.
 - This is made clear at Colin Khoo's wedding, when Nick's various relatives shudder at the opulence of the "ridiculous" wedding, reception and ball. And that makes it easier to understand why Nick doesn't better prepare Rachel to meet his family.
 - Astrid [is] the friendly face at Araminta's bachelorette weekend instead of her cousin (even though Astrid is hardly close to Araminta in the book).
 - Oliver [is] the one who transforms Rachel for the wedding, instead of a fashion consultant Peik Lin knows.
 - Nick's cousin Edison Cheng, while a point-of-view character in the book, essentially just makes cameos in the movie. But with the story so heavily centered around Rachel, this is a needed change.
 - Nick and Rachel do not get engaged, and Nick remains estranged from his mother and grandmother.
 - The main driver of the next book is the mystery of Rachel's father and her upcoming wedding.

STORY/TOPICS

- Chinese Traditions vs American-Chinese/In-Race Discrimination
- Parental Approval
- Rich Lifestyle
- Equality
- Netflix/GoldOpen

CAST:

- Chu brought on Malaysian-born screenwriter Adele Lim to give the script an Asian specificity and set off to assemble his dream cast. The worldwide search had casting directors looking in Canada, New York, Los Angeles, Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong, London, Australia, Singapore and Malaysia. All had to be English-speaking — and have the right accents, too.
- A USC Study found that 37 of the top 100 films from 2017 featured no Asian-American speaking characters, despite making up 5.6 percent of the U.S. population.
- The cast forged out together nearly every night for street food and karaoke, led by the ensemble's local natives

CONSTANCE WU (Rachel Chu)

- “The fact that Asian-Americans never get to center the narrative means that their parts are always going to be not as whole and fleshed-out.”
- Wu, who is an outspoken advocate for Asian representation on social media, said the film is significant for differentiating the Asian experience and the Asian-American experience.
- “You show that our culture is more than just skin-deep,” Wu said. “You show our similarities and how we’re different.”
- “I think we have to take control of our own voice and our own story,” Chu said. “And we won’t be perfect, this discussion is ongoing the more stuff that gets made, the more discussion we can have about what we want. We just never had the privilege of having that conversation.”
- Wu met with Chu about playing Rachel, but her ABC sitcom conflicted with his shooting schedule, so she was out. Then a month or so later, Wu was on a flight and “I guess I was feeling dramatic or something,” says the 36-year-old star.
- She wrote Chu an email: “Dates are dates, and if those are unmovable, I understand. But I would put all of my heart, hope, humor and courage into the role. What all this could do means so much to me. It’s why I advocate so much for young Asian-American girls, so they might not spend their life feeling small or being commanded to be grateful to even be at the table.” The letter convinced Chu, who pushed production about five months to accommodate Wu

MICHELLE YEOH (Eleanor Young)

- “The success of ‘Crazy Rich Asians’ has shown us that there are many more wonderful stories to tell from around the globe....”
- “[Eleanor] sees this very gullible, very feisty young woman who thinks she can just step in and change the whole system, and that’s not going to work,” Yeoh told EW. “Eleanor had to fight to be a Young. It didn’t come handed to her on a silver platter. I think when she looks at Rachel, she’s like, ‘You are totally wrong for this, because you don’t even have a concept of what you’re coming into.’”
- Born in Malaysia, Yeoh began her career as a martial arts film star. She appeared in international features including *The Heroic Trio* and well-known martial arts choreographer Yuen Woo-ping’s *Tai Chi Master* and *Wing Chun*. She is known for her role in Ang Lee’s Academy Award-winning film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and appeared in the James Bond film *Tomorrow Never Dies* as well as Marvel’s *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2*.
- 30-year career on the silver screen

HENRY GOLDING (Nick Young)

- Then the director received a tip from an accountant in the production’s Malaysian office who remembered watching a travel video years earlier that was hosted by a handsome young Asian man with a British accent. Intrigued, Chu and Taylor began cyber-stalking the social media accounts of Henry Golding, a Singapore-based presenter for travel programs on the BBC and Discovery Channel Asia.
- Chu reached out via a mutual friend and Golding, 31, sent a self-tape for what he figured would be a bit part. That led to a 17-hour trip to L.A. for a chemistry read with Wu, then, days later, a screen test with the studio

- “Spending my childhood in England, I was always labeled as Asian. I’m Asian. I was born in Asia, I’ve grown up most of my life in Asia. Jon would not have chosen me if he didn’t think I was right for the role.”

GEMMA CHAN (Astrid Leong)

- Already a fan of the book, the British actress felt extremely passionate about staying true to her character.
- “I spoke a lot with [director] Jon Chu about the Astrid storyline because I had read and loved the books, but that’s a book that’s several hundred pages long, and this is a movie that’s an hour and 45,” she said. “So things had to be streamlined, and I was happy with what they decided in the end.”
- Gemma Chan is set to play Minn-Erva in the Disney/Marvel superhero movie that stars Brie Larson as Carol Danvers/Captain Marvel. Per the comics-verse, Minn-Erva (aka Doctor Minerva) is a Kree geneticist and spy.

AWKWAFINA (Goh Peik Lin)

- “We’ve all been ‘that Asian’ on set at one point. That dynamic didn’t exist here....”
- “There were no talks about what she would sound like, or what she would act like,” she says. “God bless [director Jon M. Chu]. He really trusted me. The cool thing about Peik Lin is that what you see was born in that scene. There were no talks about what she would sound like, or what she would act like. All we had was that blonde wig.”
- “She’s bawdy, brash, she’s constantly screaming, she’s *freaking out*,” says Awkwafina.
- When Chu cast her, there was absolutely no pressure at all. “He said it’s either going to make the movie, or ruin the movie,” she recalls.
- Birthname Nora Lum, is many things: a rapper, a YouTube sensation, an author, and an actor.
- Grew up in Forest Hills, Queens and eventually took up the nickname Awkwafina, partly as a lark, in her teens. (At first it was “Aquafina,” until someone told her she might get sued.)
- “When I think of Nora, I don’t qualify it, like, *Oh, she’s the funniest Asian-American millennial woman under 5’9*”. I just think she’s one of the funniest comedic actors working today.” - Jeong
- “I’ve definitely become more cautious and a little bit more nervous and paranoid. I’m representing my community in a bigger way than I ever have,” says Awkwafina.

KEN JEONG (Goh Wye Mun)

- “To be a part of this movie in any fashion is deep. It’s a lot of feels right now,” Jeong said. “It’s every emotion except sadness.”
- “We’ve gotten to a point where it’s accepted to have Asian-American supporting roles in major movies, and I’ve been a beneficiary of that. But when all the participants are Asian, it’s even more joyous to support the story and each other.”
- Jeong and Awkwafina volleying subversive one-liners; it was largely improvised.
- Earned the nickname “Papafina.”

RONNIE CHIENG (Eddie Chang)

- *Crazy Rich Asians* from an article in late 2016 that mentioned that Chu was looking for actors who had the authentic accent of those living in Singapore and Malaysia. “I called

my agent and said, 'If you can get me an audition, I swear I can book this one,'" says Chieng, 32, who grew up in Singapore and Malaysia. "In fact, this is the only one I can book, because there's no other movie that's going to ask for this kind of accent."

SELENA TAN (Alexandra 'Alix' Young)

- Check out AOM interview with Selena Tan.

LISA LU (Grandmother)

- An actress for more than six decades
- She is best known by American audiences for her roles in *2012*, *The Last Emperor* and *The Joy Luck Club*.
 - In fact, there is a wink and a nudge to *The Joy Luck Club* in *Crazy Rich Asians*.
 - In one scene, which is not in the book, Rachel and Elenor meet up for a game of mahjong - the same game that is the focus of the 1993 movie.

DIRECTING: (Jon M. Chu)

- Jon M. Chu, who would eventually sign on to direct "Crazy Rich Asians," had already been hearing about this new book from family members. His last name is the same as that of the main character, Rachel Chu, and they're both from Cupertino.
- The Bay Area-native hopes *Crazy Rich Asians* creates opportunities for more films with primarily Asian-American casts. "It's unfair for one movie to represent all these people," he told *Deadline*.
- "One movie that represents [all] Asians — that's just ridiculous. However, if this can crack the door a little bit so that other stories can be told, and it spawns a resurgence in these stories getting shown at the highest levels possible — I would love to have this."

TRIVIA

- After *The Joy Luck Club* was released, [Chu's] family won an auction to have dinner with an actress from the film. That actress turned out to be Lisa Lu, who 25 years later portrays Nick's grandmother in *Crazy Rich Asians*. A year or two later, when Chu was 16, he traveled with a performing arts troupe to the Malaysian state of Sarawak to perform for members of the Iban tribe — the very same ethnic group his future leading man, Golding, hails from.

PRODUCTION/CINEMATOGRAPHY (Vanja Cernjul)

- Eight-week shoot commenced in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in April 2017.
- The \$30 million production would move to the more-costly Singapore for □ its final three weeks
- "There were places we almost didn't get a few days before we locked in – like Gardens By The Bay," Chu revealed. While Gardens By The Bay was "very 'open arms' and very ready for us", it was also celebrating its five-year anniversary at the time of filming, which presented a very unique problem. "They had a light show every night for a week, so we had to work around that. When the light show went on, everything had to stop," said Chu. "Because they respected the public who were coming out to witness this, they did not want (the film shoot) to disturb their watching." Chu had to shut down his set, turn off his lights, and allow the public onto his live film set to watch the Gardens By The Bay's light show.

- Marina Bay Sands SkyPark - Sweeping vistas of the Marina Bay area and Marina Bay Sands hotel – the building that looks like a ship marooned on top of three skyscrapers
- Raffles Hotel - Although in Kwan's novel the hotel where naive heroine Rachel Chu and her crazy rich boyfriend Nick Young stay sounds like the five-star Goodwood Park
- Gardens by the Bay- Colin and Araminta's spectacular evening wedding reception is held here amid the Supertrees.

EDITING/VFX (Myron I. Kerstein)

SOUND/MUSIC (Brian Tyler)

- Gabe Hilfer has had a busy year curating soundtracks, but *Crazy Rich Asians* posed a unique challenge from the start. In order to underline the film's cross-pollination between Asian and Asian-American cultures and sonically exemplify Rachel's (Constance Wu) journey east, director Jon M. Chu wanted to buoy his colorful film with a dynamic, multilingual soundtrack. "I would be lying if I said I had some pre-existing expertise in Chinese music," Hilfer admits. "So it was really cool to get into it."
- **MONEY:**
 - Chu recruited singer Cheryl K, who had submitted a YouTube audition for the film that included her singing Jessie J's "Mamma Knows Best" a cappella. They'd been impressed by her voice, and brought her in to record both English and Chinese versions of "Money."
- **WO YAO NI DE Ai:**
 - The song gets covered by Jasmine Chen, a popular Chinese jazz singer Chu had recommended Hilfer look into bringing onto *Crazy Rich Asians*. In the end, they were able to feature Chen in multiple scenes — first at the tan hua party where Rachel is introduced to Eleanor (Michelle Yeoh), and later at the \$40-million wedding, where she performs "Wo Yao Ni De Ai."
- **MATERIAL GIRL:**
 - Cantopop star Sally Yeh's cover had already existed, Hilfer didn't have too much trouble tracking down the rights to using it for the film. In fact, he had more trouble finding the cover in the first place. "This version came out of a whole *deep* dive into fun Chinese covers," he says.
 - "It was just so perfect," Hilfer says. "We had tried other things there, and that scene used to be way longer and different, and when we consolidated it down and covered it, it just seemed perfectly suited for the scene."
- **CAN'T HELP FALLING IN YOU:**
 - Luckily, Grannis had already recorded a version and was happy to rerecord the song to time it to the scene, which involved a dramatic pause while Araminta (Sonoya Mizuno) steps into the water and begins to walk up the aisle to Colin (Chris Pang).
 - "It was serendipitous," Hilfer says. "It's such a beautiful wedding song, and we wanted to customize it to when the water floods the walkway and the bride steps in. [Kina] wanted to participate and was available, and I really feel like she adds an element of grace and class."
- **YELLOW:**
 - Jon M. Chu, the only tune that could fit the bill was Coldplay's 2000 breakthrough single "Yellow." Warner Bros. was concerned that the song's title was

problematic (the word has been used as an ethnic slur against Asians), but that's exactly why Chu wanted it. "We're going to own that term," he told *The Hollywood Reporter* in an outtake from *THR*'s cover story. "If we're going to be called yellow, we're going to make it beautiful."

- Coldplay turned down the request. Jeff Yang, writing for *Quartz*, provides a possible explanation for the rejection: The band had previously been criticized for appropriating Asian culture in their 2012 song "Princess of China" and 2016's "Hymn for the Weekend," and perhaps wanted to steer clear of *Crazy Rich Asians* to be safe.
- [Chu] wrote directly to Coldplay members, laying out his reasons for needing their song, and their song alone, for the film: "[The word 'yellow'] has always had a negative connotation in my life ... until I heard your song."
- Within 24 hours of sending it, the band approved the "Yellow" request, Chu commissioned a Chinese-language cover of the tune — another meta reference to contemporary global identity, remixing culture across continents and generations. The team reached out to young Beijing singer Li Wenqi, who had popularized a Mandarin version, called "Liu Xing," on China's edition of *The Voice*, and when she declined, they found Katherine Ho, a USC freshman who previously competed on season 10 of the U.S. version of *The Voice*.

PROMOTION

- Warner Bros. has been enthusiastically promoting the movie for months, with early screenings for press and influencers alike, along with a full-force ad campaign.
- In April, an unheard-of four months before release, the studio hosted a tastemakers screening at downtown L.A.'s Theatre at Ace Hotel for 1,200 people, most of them Asian-American
- "The people who have watched it, myself included, have no qualms with pushing this out," Golding, clad in a powder blue Tom Ford tux, told *Variety*. "We love this movie so much. The response has been so insane."
- More than apparently 200 individuals and organizations have organized group screenings or bought tickets for others to see "Crazy Rich Asians."

BOX OFFICE

- (As of August 22nd, 2018)
- Domestic: \$44,431,761
- Foreign: \$652,000
- Worldwide: \$45,083,761
- Opening Weekend:
 - \$26,510,140
 - (#1 rank, 3,384 theaters, \$7,834 average)
- Topped the weekend box office with an estimated \$34 million in ticket sales in its first five days.

RECEPTION

- Rotten Tomatoes: 92% Tomometer, 93% Audience
- Cinemascore: A
- IMDb: 7.7/10

- Asians represent just 6 percent of the American population, so for *Crazy Rich Asians* to be a success, it will have to play broadly — as, in fact, its sole studio predecessor did in 1993.
- “Crazy Rich Asians” grossed \$5 million on its opening day with a solid A CinemaScore, while PostTrak exits showed 85% overall positive, 4 1/2 stars and a 68% definite recommend, Deadline reported.

SEQUELS

- “Crazy Rich Asians” author Kevin Kwan has a drama series in development at Amazon. Will Graham, who was previously an executive producer on Amazon’s “Mozart in the Jungle,” will executive produce.
- Though the sequel has not been officially greenlighted yet, Warner Bros. is already planning a sequel for the hit film.
- The sequel will be based on the second installment of the “Crazy Rich Asians” trilogy by author Kevin Kwan, “China Rich Girlfriend.” The plan is to have original screenwriters Peter Chiarelli and Adele Lim return for the sequel.
- Actors Constance Wu, Henry Golding and Michelle Yeoh have options for the sequel. Once a script is in place, Warners will assess a full greenlight.
- “We’d love to make one, but not unless the audience asks for it, and hopefully they will this weekend.” Indeed they have, shelling out \$44.4M in the first week on the \$30M production.
- If you were wondering why in the world Harry Shum Jr. had a 5-second cameo at the end of *Crazy Rich Asians*, your questions will be answered in this sequel. (Charlie Wu) We learn snippets of Astrid and Charlie’s backstory before Charlie ever appears on the scene, and they have quite the history: They dated as teenagers, and Charlie essentially popped Astrid’s fashion cherry — that is, he took her on a guided tour of Paris for the very, very rich. There, he taught her to enjoy spending her bottomless well of money on fashion, jewels, and luxury, and set her on the path to becoming the style icon she is today. There are two Charlie/Astrid tidbits that appear in each of the movie trailers, featuring them dancing, which does not happen in the final film.

- How do you feel about the title? Does it dissuade people?
- CNBC did a story about stars from the film and their crazy rich experiences in Singapore. You were featured. Can you expand on your answer?
(<https://www.cnbc.com/2018/08/15/crazy-rich-asians-stars-reveal-favorite-experiences-in-singapore.html>)

Have you heard about #GoldOpen and if so, what are your thoughts?

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/15/movies/crazy-rich-asians-gold-open.html>)

- What are your thoughts on the producers not taking the Netflix deal?
- In your opinion, what needs to happen to make this movie a success?
- lots of time in Singapore
- There's so many characters and so many perspectives to essentially what makes someone a good Chinese person. Why do you think this balance works despite the large quantity? Were you involved in some of those conversations?
- effect it's had on them. Can you describe it? Have you felt it from others yet?
- Singlish
- Have you read the book(s)?
 - What elements are you looking forward to from the other books to see onscreen?
- Did you find any relatable aspects to any of these characters?
- Do you think the story represents the Asian culture/mentality positively?