

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### A.1 Background of the Research

In the study of cultural dynamics, particularly within postcolonial contexts, the intersection of traditional norms and evolving societal roles often reveals underlying power structures that perpetuate inequality. Women, as a historically marginalized group, have frequently been at the forefront of these transformations, challenging societal expectations and striving for autonomy in various cultural settings (Pierz & Dapi, 2021). However, despite significant progress in some areas, gender disparities persist, particularly within certain Asian cultures where traditional family dynamics still exert considerable influence.

The persistence of these traditional norms is evident in the practices that govern family and social interactions. For instance, in elite societies such as the Singaporean-Chinese community, familial expectations and marriage traditions often reinforce systemic gender-based constraints (Inoue, 2004). These constraints are not merely reflections of outdated customs but are deeply intertwined with the social hierarchies and power dynamics that continue to shape these communities.

The complexity of gender roles within these social structures is further compounded by the marginalization of subaltern groups—those

who are oppressed or voiceless within the dominant cultural narrative. The subaltern, often overlooked or silenced, must navigate a complex landscape where their struggle for acceptance and recognition is met with resistance. This struggle is emblematic of broader societal conflicts, where the voices of the marginalized are either suppressed or co-opted to maintain the status quo.

In literature, these dynamics are vividly portrayed, providing a lens through which to examine the ongoing tensions between tradition and modernity, autonomy and subjugation. One such example is Kevin Kwan's novel *Crazy Rich Asians*, which serves as a rich text for exploring these themes. The novel's protagonist, Rachel Chu, finds herself at the intersection of these cultural and social forces, where her identity and autonomy are challenged by the expectations of an elite Singaporean-Chinese family.

Rachel Chu's experiences in the novel can be analyzed through the lens of subaltern theory, which seeks to give voice to the oppressed and highlight the mechanisms of power that maintain their marginalization. Her struggle for acceptance within Nicholas Young's family reflects the broader challenges faced by individuals who do not conform to the dominant cultural norms, particularly in contexts where wealth and social status are tightly controlled.

The novel also provides a critique of the patriarchal structures that

continue to dominate elite social circles. Rachel's journey underscores the tension between her identity as an independent, successful woman and the oppressive expectations imposed by Nicholas's family. Despite her achievements and strong sense of self, Rachel is marginalized and excluded, a reflection of the broader societal attitudes toward women's autonomy and agency within such rigid social hierarchies.

Furthermore, Rachel's story highlights the internal contradictions within post-feminist ideals, which often celebrate individual success while ignoring the systemic barriers that continue to oppress women. The novel challenges these ideals by illustrating how deeply entrenched social hierarchies and cultural norms can undermine even the most accomplished individuals, forcing them into subaltern roles despite their personal achievements.

The matriarch of the Young family, Eleanor Young, embodies the traditional values that perpetuate these oppressive structures. Her opposition to Rachel is not only personal but symbolic of the broader resistance to change within patriarchal societies. Eleanor's role as an enforcer of these norms demonstrates how women themselves can become agents of patriarchy, reinforcing the very systems that oppress them.

This research aims to explore the intersections of wealth, power, and subaltern status in *Crazy Rich Asians*, with a focus on how these factors

contribute to the marginalization of women within elite social contexts. By examining Rachel Chu's struggles, the study seeks to shed light on the ongoing conflict between personal autonomy and societal expectations, particularly in postcolonial and post-feminist frameworks.

In conclusion, the background of this research sets the stage for a critical examination of the systemic barriers that continue to oppress women, even in contexts where they have achieved personal success. Rachel Chu's narrative serves as a microcosm of the broader sociocultural dynamics that shape women's experiences in contemporary Asian societies, offering valuable insights into the enduring challenges of achieving true autonomy and agency in a world still governed by traditional power structures.

#### A.2 Problem of the Research

1. How does Rachel Chu's character challenge familial oppressions?
2. What action Rachel Chu's take to gain acceptance in the elite society?

#### A.3 Objective of the Research

The objective of this research is to analyze the character of Rachel Chu in Kevin Kwan's *Crazy Rich Asians* to understand how she dealt with familial oppressions throughout the story. This study aims to :

1. Examine the portrayal of Rachel Chu through the lens of subaltern theory to highlight issues of marginalization, exclusion, and resistance within the elite Singaporean-Chinese context.

2. Investigate and explore Rachel Chu's Bicultural identity as an American Born Chinese facing the impact of familial oppressions between two social classes and its structures depicted in the novel. Taking focus on romance and power elements based on Gayatri Spivak Subaltern Perspective, which focuses on the voices and experiences of marginalized groups who are often silenced or overlooked by dominant power structures. The term "subaltern" refers to those who are socially, politically, or geographically outside the hegemonic power structure. It is shaping Rachel's journey to gain acceptance in the elite society.

#### A.4 Significance of the Study

This study delves into the cultural and social dynamics of affluent Singaporean Chinese society via the lens of Rachel Chu's character in '*Crazy Rich Asians*.' It emphasizes the difficulties women encounter when reconciling traditional gender norms and familial obligations, providing a nuanced view on intersectionality and subaltern identities. The study contributes to gender studies and feminist theory discussions by delving into themes such as love, power, and identity. It also emphasizes the importance of modern literature in commenting on and analyzing societal concerns, providing essential knowledge to researchers, politicians, and practitioners working toward gender equality and social justice.

#### A.5 Limitation of the Research

This study focuses on Rachel Chu in '*Crazy Rich Asians*,' potentially overlooking insights from other female characters, which may limit the comprehensiveness of the findings. The research's literary and cultural critique is based on the novel's depiction, which may not fully capture real-world complexities of women's experiences in elite Singaporean-Chinese society. Additionally, the focus on this specific cultural context limits the generalizability of the findings to other regions or cultures. The analysis is interpretative and subjective, influenced by the researcher's perspective and theoretical framework, leading to possible variations in interpretation. Furthermore, the novel's temporal setting may affect the study's long-term relevance as societal norms evolve. Lastly, while subaltern and feminist theories provide valuable insights, integrating additional theoretical perspectives could offer a more comprehensive analysis. These limitations acknowledge the study's scope while suggesting areas for broader research and deeper exploration.

#### A.6 Definition of Key Terms

The researcher wrote the key terms in this analysis with explanations of each as follows:

1. Cultural Differences: Variances in values, norms, and practices between different cultures, influencing societal expectations and interactions.
2. Subalterns: Marginalized groups or individuals who are socially,

politically, and economically oppressed or excluded within dominant power structures.

3. Psychological Repression: Psychological repression is a defense mechanism aimed at reducing anxiety or discomfort associated with these thoughts or feelings.

4. Gender Disparities: Inequalities and differences in treatment, opportunities, and expectations between individuals of different genders.

5. Power Dynamics: The distribution and exercise of power within social relationships and structure.

