



Literary Studies

Visualizing Lifestyle and Fashion Behavior in Kevin Kwan's Novel *Crazy Rich Asians*, Represented in the Film by Jon M. Chu

Audesza Rizkia Zahra ¹, Diah Tyahaya Iman ²^{1,2}English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Andalas, Indonesia**SUBMISSION TRACK**

Received: August 10, 2024
 Final Revision: September 14, 2024
 Accepted : October 21, 2024
 Available Online: November 11, 2024

KEYWORD

Adaptation, Fashion, Lifestyle, Class, Migrant

CORRESPONDENCE

E-mail: diahtiman@gmail.com

A B S T R A C T

This study compares the novel *Crazy Rich Asians* by Kevin Kwan (2013) and the film adaptation of the same title, *Crazy Rich Asians*, by director Jon M. Chu (2018). Using the adaptation theory by Linda Hutcheon, this thesis examines how Jon M. Chu describes lifestyle and fashion behavior by looking at the three points of social stratification proposed by Max Weber. This research was carried out using a qualitative method. We argue that the lifestyle of upper-class people and fashion behavior in the novel are illuminated luxuriously on the screen. The atmosphere in the film of the lifestyle and fashion behavior strengthens the arrogant manners of the elite class. The novel's social dynamics and romantic drama have been exposed with a strong ambiance for the cinematic experience for the audience.

I. INTRODUCTION

There have been a lot of Studies regarding the relationship between literature and film. The relationship between literature and film is usually known as adaptation. Film adaptations of multiple works are no less popular than the original works. Ellis (2022) highlights that adaptations often revitalize older texts, introducing them to new generations and allowing them to resonate within a different cultural context. It is a process of making less a pre-existent text to a series of functions: characters, locations, costumes, actions, and strings of narrative events. Since then, there have been many film adaptations of various works, such as short stories, drama scripts, novels, etc. One of the famous film adaptations recently is the film adaptation of Kevin Kwan's *Crazy Rich Asians* novel with the same title directed by Jon M. Chu, who is a Singaporean Chinese who is successful in the United States as a director, producer, and also scriptwriter.

The *Crazy Rich Asians* novel was adapted into a film, and the film was released in 2018. The film was directed by John M. Chu and produced by Nina Jacobson, Brad Simpson, and John Penotti. On 7 August 2018, this film was shown for the first time at the TCL Chinese Theater. It began its release in America on 15 August 2018 and was produced by Warner Bros. Pictures. This film can provide a visual of negative stereotypes about someone's background. The film shows how Nick's mother, who is of Chinese descent and lives in Singapore, views her son's lover, Rachel, who is of Chinese descent and living in America. There is a stereotype of Chinese migrants in Singapore to Chinese in the US because a particular identity is formed (Zhou & Liu, 2015).

The popularity of *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) succeeded in becoming the first film whose cast was primarily Asian, so you could say it was a big step in Asian cinema and able to compete in Hollywood. Welsh (2007) says, "Not being bold can cripple the processes of adaptation, and one can end up with not so much an adaptation as an embalment of a famous work." According to Leitch (2007), "Fidelity as a touchstone of adaptations will always give their source texts, which are always faithful to themselves,

an advantage so enormous and unfair that it renders the comparison meaningless” (page 30). *Crazy Rich Asians* film shows the director’s interpretation of the exciting lifestyle and fashion of Chinese families in Singapore and the life of Chinese single mothers in the USA. Casetti (2004) emphasizes that adaptations do not simply translate texts from one medium to another but engage in a dialogue with the social discourses prevalent at their creation. Prihatiningsih, Iman, and Zurmailis (2024) recently mentioned many literary works portraying sisterhood. Kwan’s novel *Crazy Rich Asians* shows how women support each other to solve their problems.

Bazin (2004) discusses how cinema has evolved from early silent films to more complex forms of storytelling and points out the importance of realistic representation rather than overly stylized or artificial techniques. Jon M. Chu adapted the novel into a film for a reason. Gray quoted in his interview with *Variety* (2019) that Chu said he had a purpose in adapting the novel into a film, and it was very challenging. Smith and Maurer (2000) state that lifestyle is focused on how people live in a society that involves working, eating, sleeping, playing, and communicating patterns. In addition, according to Sproles (1979), fashion behavior can be defined as a way of behaving adopted by some social group members, which can be seen because the chosen behavior can be considered socially appropriate for a particular time and situation. Kusuma and Setiasari (2020) claim that the characters in Kwan’s novel think of the right way to get pleasure even though they always spend their money and waste all the time they have. Therefore, the lifestyle and fashion behavior in the novel and the film adaptation are enjoyable to be discussed. This adaptation shows how the novel is depicted as a film about lifestyle and fashion behavior.

In this study, the researcher will focus on researching the adaptation process of the novel into the film. To conduct the research, the researcher will use the adaptation theory of Linda Hutcheon. In Linda Hutcheon’s view (2006), adaptation the adaptation process is a process that tells the same thing but differs in how it is conveyed. The storyteller always uses the same tools, but the story to be conveyed is taken from another place and is not a story that has just been made (Hutcheon, 2006). The adapters take a story from another place or media, such as novels, short stories, and other media. Then, the story they take is changed according to the wishes of the adapter, but it still uses the same material or story. Richard (2021) says that the adaptation process involves retelling a narrative of text and translating emotional and sensory experiences of literary texts. Cartmell (2012) says that adaptations have been seen as a strategy to explore the amazing of literary works, and it is a transformative process.

Adaptation is the act of replicating something without imitating it. That is, the purpose of this adaptation is to change, organize, and make it fit (Hutcheon, 2006: 7). Pertiwi and Iman (2021) state that in a novel adaptation, a filmmaker rearranges and heightens the key elements that he adapts to the film screen. Hutcheon (2006) says there are other factors to consider when analyzing adaptations outside the connection between books and film and where filmmakers interpret and transform the original text to convey new meanings, The range and number of adaptation categories are considerable. Kranz (2007) mentions that there is a probability that producers, directors, and audiences have an understanding that is sometimes greater than the value of most other intertexts in the minds of those who make and watch films. Hutcheon argues that adaptation comprises acknowledging the original text and transforming it. Then, the adaptation means allowing for reinterpreting the story or innovative reimagining rather than mere copying (Hutcheon, 2006). While using this theory, the researcher focused on the lifestyle and fashion behavior discussed in the novel.

II. METHOD

In conducting research, library research is used to facilitate the writers. To observe the data, the researcher uses secondary and primary data from Kevin Kwan’s novel *Crazy Rich Asians* and its film adaptation with the same title. Not only that, but the authors also take and cite information from various media such as books, essays, journals, and several websites found on the internet to support the research topic. Then, the next step is analyzing the data in which the researcher analyzes the novel and connects it with the film adaptation and the information gathered from the secondary data. The last step is presenting the data. In presenting the data, the researcher provides the results of the qualitative research, which will

be presented descriptively by looking at how Kevin Kwan presents elements of lifestyle and fashion behavior and then how Jon M. Chu adapts the lifestyle of the book. Then, it will also explain how fashion behavior is presented by Kevin Kwan in the novel and interpreted on the screen by Jon M. Chu. As a result of collecting data in words, this study includes quotations.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The novel and film *Crazy Rich Asians* represent the lives of upper-class Singaporeans with extravagant lifestyles. This research examines the three points of social stratification: class, power, and social. This study will analyze how people's lifestyles and fashion behaviors due to their class status and power in the novel film *Crazy Rich Asians* adapted to the film.

The Adaptation of Lifestyle Represented Crazy Rich Asians Novel and Film

The researchers focused on the adaptation of lifestyle represented from the novel to the film adaptation. Max Weber uses the term lifestyle, which, according to him, is determined mainly by formal education and is called a status group. Holt (1997) mentions that lifestyles are how individuals prompt their identities, often formed by the symbolic meanings of the products they consume. Weber opposed Max's theory, which states that society is divided based on economic dimensions because there are also social status classes apart from economic classes (1922). Weber proposed the division of power towards social stratification. He identified three interrelated components: class, status, and power, and he considered a range of factors, including skills, education, and opportunities, when determining class position. (Weber, 1922: 926).

According to Weber, regarding class, it is necessary to recognize the importance of economic factors in forming social hierarchies. Weber also emphasized the importance of power as a separate dimension of social stratification (1922). Weber (1922) said power is the ability of individuals or groups to achieve their goals despite resistance. Power relates to an individual's ability to influence others and control resources, regardless of economic class or social status, and it can be gained from various sources, including economic resources, political influence, social relationships, expertise, and organizational position (Weber, 1922). Weber defined class with society's economic life opportunities (1922). Class status is defined as many people who have specific causal components of their life chances in common, as these components are represented exclusively by economic interests in possession of goods and opportunities for earning income and are represented in the form of a class. Barnard (2014) argues that fashion is a form of non-verbal communication that expresses information about individuals' social status, gender, and cultural affiliations.

The main characters, Nick Young and Rachel Chu are perfect examples of social class inequality in both novels and films. From their backgrounds, according to the novel, Nick Young was born into a respected and ultra-rich family in his hometown, Singapore. Meanwhile, Rachel Chu was born to a single parent who was an immigrant in America. Kevin Kwan depicts social inequality in *Crazy Rich Asians* through various narrative elements, such as character interactions, settings, and cultural nuances. The novel characters use wealth and social status to exclude others and maintain their superiority. This can be seen from how certain families or individuals look down on Rachel Chu, a woman who is not from the elite and does not meet their standards. Pahlevi and Sagimin (2020) state that their different family background causes the differences in their social classes. Nasution, Nasution, and Pohan (2021) mention that Chinese people in the upper classes in Singapore look down on other people who are lower than their class and limit their children's friendships. Parts of the events in the novel are depicted in the film with slight differences. As a result, Jon M. Chu creates more dramatic scenes.

In the film, Kwan portrays how the upper-class characters do not respect people who are not rich and live a modest way. The differences in social class greatly influenced the relationship between the two because commoners would not be well received by the royal family, no matter what. In the novel, Nick's mother confronts her son's girlfriend, Rachel, who is behind him. Jon M. Chu presents a neat moment by presenting a tense scene where Rachel Chu is confronted by Eleanor directly and simultaneously with Ah Ma, Nick's grandmother, who holds the honorable throne in the Young family. This scene shows

Eleanor's disapproval of Rachel's presence in her family, leading to a conflict in the film, causing Rachel and Nick's relationship to collapse instantly.

The film highlights luxurious and glamorous parties, which differs from what Kwan portrays in the novel. Kwan presents humor and irony to portray Nicks's family's social elite's obsession with wealth and status. Kwan's portrayal can be regarded as exaggerated, but he successfully exposes the poshness of the wealthy family and the lower-status family. In his novel, Kwan depicts many scenes of cold conflicts, constant competition, and judgment between the two different class statuses; on the other hand, Jon M. Chu presents a more empowering tone in his film. The film elaborates on the beauty and attraction of the elite lifestyle, so the audience witnesses Eleanor's disapproval of Rachel's relationship with Nick, ingrained in her concern that Rachel cannot understand and fix the family's values. Rachel Chu is seen as different and unaccepted because she is regarded as a migrant in America, does not come from a respectable family, and is of lower-class status. Jon M. Chu shows the elite family throwing lavish parties and Nick's family tradition, especially the tradition passed from his grandmother. His mother wants to have a daughter-in-law who can understand her role in preserving their culture.

Furthermore, a clear difference between the novel and the film can be seen when, in the novel, Nick is very protective of his family's privacy, while in the film, it is shown that Nick's family is a very famous upper-class family in Singapore. In the novel, Peik Lin, Rachel Chu's best friend, is amazed at Nick's family's wealth when he takes Rachel to Nick's grandmother's house. However, in the film, the party is depicted as very famous, showing that the brands they wear are their primary concern.

Fashion Behavior of the Upper Class in Crazy Rich Asians Novel and Film

In the novel, Kevin Kwan describes clothing patterns to suit the character's personality. The film describes the lifestyle through extravagant outfits and purchases, symbolizing their social standing. Webber states that social stratification is divined through class, status, and power. Ifada and Mufidah (2019) claim that *Crazy Rich Asians*' novel shows that fashion is a way to represent their social identity. In the novel, Kwan shows how the characters reveal their values and attitudes toward their wealth by wearing and using luxury brands and high-end designers. On the other hand, Rachel and her mother, as commoners, do not care about the brands and do not wear flashier brands.

In the novel and film, Rachel Chu is depicted as a commoner among the nobles. Not only that but being the daughter of a Chinese migrant in America, she had never met her father and believed he had died. A single mother raised her, and Rachel's profession as a professor of economics at New York University symbolizes her status as a self-made and modern Chinese American woman. Jon M. Chu perfects it with film visualizations that match the novel's description. Rachel's presence starkly contrasts Nick's family and circle of friends in his hometown in Singapore. Nick's background, which turns out to be from the upper class or old money, is very different from Rachel's, who grew up in America only with her mother, far from a life of glamour and wealth.

The film shows how the upper-class characters have power over the lower class through several things, one of which is fashion style. For example, wearing a dress that matches their fashionable style to their party is very important. Their class status and pride are judged through their extravagant looks. Kwan's narrative delves into Eleanor Young proudly wearing a traditional Chinese dress that conveys their pride in their cultural heritage and elite status and power. She brings up her role and commitment to upholding Chinese values through style. Meanwhile, in the movie, Chu shows that Rachel's fashion emphasizes her status visually as an American and an outsider culturally. in the movie without the detailed brand distinctions found in the book.

In the novel, parties are closely related to fashion because appearance is emphasized at parties. At the same time, Jon M. Chu portrays it in the film by visualizing the luxurious fabulous fashion in several party scenes in the novel. The film vividly presents fashion behavior as a power symbol, a critical element of the upper-class lifestyle. Fashion is a symbol of ourselves and shows our social status in society. Kevin Kwan explained in detail the luxurious fashion worn by upper-class Chinese Singaporeans to symbolize their power, which can be seen in their exclusive, flashy, and elegant brands. Jon M. Chu makes this

clear through visualizations in the film, which show how power in fashion works, as seen in the portrait of Rachel Chu attending Collin and Aramanta's wedding with elegant, luxurious, and classy make-up, which succeeded in attracting the attention of no less upper-class people.

Apart from that, fashion behavior highlights the importance of appearance and prestige in the world of upper-class society depicted in *Crazy Rich Asians*, where one's clothing can function as a form of social currency and a means of asserting dominance or asserting a place in social stratification, namely the upper class. *Crazy Rich Asians* is a faithful adaptation and delves into the differences between Chinese Singaporeans and Chinese Americans (Smail, 2018). They regard Rachel, an American Chinese simple performance, as not fitting their family's style.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing two works that present the story of Kwan's novel, *Crazy Rich Asians*, and its adaptation, we argue that several essential alterations exist in the film. In the movie, the shaded power dynamics of the elite family are the main emphasis. M. Chu interprets and transforms yet eminently relatable the original text to convey and shape Kwan's novel's messages and cultural context. The novel depicts a luxurious lifestyle and excessively high-priced fashion to convey the character's social class, status, and power. Fashion and lifestyle are used in the film to give more visual impact to the audience and strengthen the class tensions. Their lifestyle and fashion behavior vividly convey their identity related to their class, status, power, and personalities. Chu successfully adapts Rachel's image as an educated and modest daughter of a Chinese migrant. Director M. Chu thoroughly captivates the exploration of cultural conflicts and Asian identities and heightens the audience's intrigue and understanding of the novel's narrative. The film's narrative exposes the internal lives of women from different classes and the complexities of a family entrenched in extreme wealth.

REFERENCES

- Barnard, M. (2014). *Fashion theory: An introduction*. (pp. 91–108). Routledge.
- Bazin, A. (2004). *What is Cinema? Vol. I* (Vol. 20). (pp. 154–163). Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Cartmell, D. (Ed.). (2012). *Companion to Literature, Film, and Adaptation*. (pp. 1–13). John Wiley & Sons.
- Casetti, F. (2004). Adaptation and mis-adaptations: Film, literature, and social discourses. In R. R. Smith & J. D. Miller (Eds.), *A companion to literature and film* (pp. 250–270). Blackwell Publishing.
- Ellis, J. (2022). The literary adaptation. *Adaptations: Critical and Primary Sources*, p. 255. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.
- Gray, Tim. (2019, January 11). Jon M. Chu on 'Crazy Rich Asians': 'We Had a Sense of Purpose'. *Variety Magazine*. <https://variety.com/2019/film/news/jon-chu-crazy-rich-asians-1203105999/>.
- Holt, D. B. (1997). Poststructuralist lifestyle analysis: Conceptualizing the social patterning of consumption in postmodernity. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 23(4), 326–350.
- Hutcheon, L. (2006). *A theory of adaptation*.
- Ifada, N., & Mufidah, Z. (2019). Social Identity Expressions in Kevin Kwan's *Crazy Rich Asians*. *Prosodi (Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa dan Sastra)*, 13 (2), 101-107. <https://journal.trunojoyo.ac.id/prosodi/article/view/6087>.
- Kusuma, M. L. O., & Setiasari, W. (2020). Hedonism in 'Crazy Rich Asians' novel by Kevin Kwan. *GENRE Journal of Applied Linguistics of FBS UNIMED*, 9. No. 3. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24114/genre.v9i3.24462>.
- David L. Kranz. (2007). *Trying Harder: Probability, Objectivity, and Rationality in Adaptation Studies*.

- Welsh, J. M., Welsh, J. M., & Lev, P. (Eds.). (2007). *The Literature/Film Reader: Issues of Adaptation*. (pp.77–102). Scarecrow Press.
- Kwan, K. (2018). *Crazy Rich Asians*. First Anchor Books Movie Tie-In Edition. New York, Anchor Books, A Penguin Random House LLC division.
- Leitch, T. M. (2007). Literature vs. Literacy: Two Futures for Adaptation Studies in Adaptation Studies. Welsh, J. M., Welsh, J. M., & Lev, P. (Eds.). (2007). *The Literature/Film Reader: Issues of Adaptation*. (pp. 15-34). Scarecrow Press.
- Nasution, A. U., Nasution, S. N., & Pohan, R. A. R. (2021). An analysis of social classes and Its impact in Crazy Rich Asian novel by Kevin Kwan. *Ling Poet: Journal of Linguistics and Literary Research*, 2(1), 72-85.
- Pahlevi, D. R., & Sagimin, E. M. (2020). Social Classes Reflected by The Main Characters in Kevin Kwan's "Crazy Rich Asians" Novel. *Jurnal Dinamika*, 1(2), 65-79.
- Pertiwi, I., & Iman, D. T. (2022, April). Cinematic Adaptation of Markus Zusak's Novel, The Book Thief: A Newfangled Perspective on The Nazi War, Anti-Semitism, and Narrative. In *ICGCS 2021: Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Gender, Culture and Society, ICGCS 2021, 30-31 August 2021, Padang, Indonesia*, 303-. European Union Digital Library. DOI 10.4108/eai.30-8-2021.2316288.
- Prihatiningsih, T, Iman, Diah T. I., Zurmailis, Z. (2024). Pembebasan Suara Perempuan Melalui Sisterhood Dalam the Girl with The Louding Voice Karya Abi Dare. *Pendas: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar*. Vol. 9 No. 1 (2024): Volume 09 No. 01 Maret 2024, 5232-5249. <https://doi.org/10.23969/jp.v9i1.12737>
- Richard, D. E. (2021). *Film Phenomenology and Adaptation: Sensuous Elaboration*.
- Smail, G. (2018, August 13). Crazy Rich Asians review – glossy romcom is a vital crowd-pleaser. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2018/aug/13/crazy-rich-asians-review-kevin-kwan>.
- Smith C., Maurer F. (2000). *Community Health Nursing; Theory and practice*. (2nd ed.). W.B. Saunders Company. Philadelphia (pp. 449–452).
- Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology* (Vol. 1). University of California Press.
- Welsh, J. M., Welsh, J. M., & Lev, P. (Eds.). (2007). *The Literature/Film Reader: Issues of Adaptation*. Scarecrow Press.
- Zhou, M. & Liu, H. (2015). Transnational Entrepreneurship and Immigrant Integration: New Chinese Immigrants in Singapore and the United States. In Vallejo (Ed.), *Research in the Sociology of Work* (Vol. 27). 145–160. Emerald Group Publishing. DOI: 10.1108/S0277-283320150000027021