

# CRAZY•RICH•ASIANS

## KEVIN KWAN (*Author, Executive Producer*) Q&A

### **QUESTION: What inspired you to write the novel *Crazy Rich Asians*?**

KEVIN KWAN: For a college creative writing course, I wrote a poem called “Singapore Bible Study.” When I read the poem in class, my fellow students were just floored by it and they wanted to know more. I thought, “Wow, I am onto something.” Then, I put it away for 20 years.

Eventually, “Singapore Bible Study” became chapter two of my novel *Crazy Rich Asians*. The chapter is about a child observing a Bible study group in the home of a very rich woman. The study group was an excuse to gossip and show off new jewelry. So, it was a comedic poem, which, years later, I decided to try and turn into a book chapter. When I finished the chapter, I decided to keep writing, and ultimately completed the novel. That chapter made it into the movie as a scene where Eleanor is leading the bible study at Carol Tai’s house.

### **QUESTION: How involved were you with the film?**

KEVIN KWAN: I was involved throughout the process. I worked with the screenwriters, took them out to lunch, and we talked about the characters and about what I wanted to evoke. Then, they went off and wrote. During production, I worked with [director] Jon [M. Chu], who had many questions for me. Jon introduced me to the production designer and costume designer, and I worked with them closely, sending images and family pictures that I thought would help them visualize this world.

### **QUESTION: What is it like to work with Jon?**

KEVIN KWAN: Jon consistently surprised me with the depth of his brilliance, especially the way he creates dazzling visual moments on screen. And the way he brings us into the story on a whole different level and approach and which fleshes out the actors’ amazing performances. He has such a masterful control of the set, which was always so Zen and friendly. In the middle of all the chaos of a movie set, there was this calm. I was always impressed.

### **QUESTION: What was your most memorable moment on set?**

KEVIN KWAN: I was very emotional during my first day of watching the filming. I was jetlagged, and production took me straight to the set. The first thing I saw were two vintage photographs of my grandparents. It was like coming home, in a way.

At the same time, everything was larger than life: Hundreds of people are capturing the dinner party scene. Actors and background artists were dressed in tuxedos and ball gowns. There were even food stylists. Experiencing the breadth of the production for the first time made me feel like, “Wow, this is real, they are really making a movie! [Laughs] It was for me a profound moment.

**QUESTION: What impressed you most about the film?**

KEVIN KWAN: I think we have such brilliant actors. For example, the level of emotion that Constance Wu brings to Rachel is so impressive; you really relate to her. Seeing Michelle Yeoh, who I am used to seeing fly through air and walk on bamboo, play this socialite, Eleanor, was unforgettable. I think audiences will view her in a whole new way because of this role. Her work in this reminds me of some of the great performances from Vanessa Redgrave or Meryl Streep.

When Michelle came on board, we had to sort out her character. At one point in the script, Eleanor was the villain, which was a departure from the book. Eleanor is multi-layered and loves her son, Nick, very much. Michelle’s insistence that we avoid the stereotypical tiger mom, allowed us to bring Eleanor closer to the book’s character. Michelle gives her character so much dimensionality that I think Eleanor will really stand out. Mothers around the world will relate to Eleanor’s situation and what she is trying to do, as much as they might also resist her tactics.

**QUESTION: You also helped cast Henry Golding, as Nick. What was it about Henry that made you feel he was right for the role?**

KEVIN KWAN: Henry embodied the character like no one else. It was serendipitous because Henry’s and Nick’s backgrounds are so similar. Henry was born and grew up in Malaysia before being sent away to school in England, where he became very British. He returned to Asia when he was in his twenties, to make a life for himself there. In the story, Nick went to New York, but his and Henry’s journeys are similar. So, we found the perfect combination of an actor who is comfortable with both Eastern and Western cultures, while remaining deeply rooted in his family obligations.

**QUESTION: Much of the story is set among the very wealthy in Singapore. Can you give us a brief overview of that society?**

KEVIN KWAN: Singapore is a tiny island with five million people, almost one in every five people is a millionaire. The bigger story is that, ten years ago, China had not a single billionaire, and now there are more than 819 billionaires – that’s 248 more than the U.S. So, Asia has been going through the largest wealth creation bubble that the world has ever seen. The amount of money being made – and spent – in such a quick time is mindboggling.

**QUESTION: How would you sum up your experience with the book and now the film?**

KEVIN KWAN: It’s going to be very interesting to see how people in the U.S. and around the world respond to the film, because it is groundbreaking. It’s the first romantic comedy from a major film studio to have Asian leads and tell a contemporary story. Whenever I see the film, I am amazed every time at what Jon has created.