



**THE DEPICTIONS OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN  
KEVIN KWAN'S *CRAZY RICH ASIANS* TRILOGY**

**A THESIS**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for S-1 Degree Majoring American Studies in the English Department,  
Faculty of Humanities Diponegoro University**

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## PRONOUNCEMENT

The writer firmly confirms that this thesis entitled *The Depictions of Gender Inequality in “Crazy Rich Asians” Trilogy* is fully written without compiling any results from other researchers who hold a diploma degree, S-1, S-2, or S-3 degree. The content of this thesis falls under my responsibility, and I firmly ensure that no materials from other researchers’ works are used other than from the references listed in the bibliography.

Semarang, May 10, 2021



Anggi Wulandari

## MOTTO AND DEDICATION

*“Whatever you are, be a good one.”*

— *Abraham Lincoln*

*I dedicate this thesis to*

*My dearest family,*

*My supportive confidants,*

*And my very own self*

**APPROVAL**  
**THE DEPICTIONS OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN**  
**KEVIN KWAN'S *CRAZY RICH ASIANS* TRILOGY**

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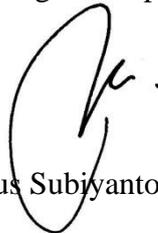
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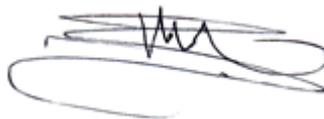
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I acknowledge that this thesis maybe open to improvement. Hence, further suggestions and recommendations from other researchers are welcome for the development of this study. I trust and believe that this thesis will significantly add to the knowledge base of the prescribed topic for all of those who have the opportunity to review it.

Semarang, May 10, 2021

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized, overlapping letters and a horizontal line extending to the right.

Anggi Wulandari

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## ABSTRACT

This study analyzes a set of novel trilogy entitled “Crazy Rich Asians”, “China Rich Girlfriend” and “Rich People’s Problems” which are written by Kevin Kwan. The purpose of this study is to examine the depictions of gender inequality. This study applies library research method as the way to collect data and compile experts’ views. The collected data and experts’ opinions are then analyzed using contextual analysis method by analyzing the intrinsic and extrinsic elements of the trilogy. As for the intrinsic elements, the study analyzes the characters, settings, and conflict. Meanwhile for the extrinsic elements, the study analyzes the depictions of gender inequality. It is found from the analysis that the trilogy depicts gender inequality both in the context of the public and home sphere. The public sphere is depicted through elements of labor force which includes job segregation, unequal chance for a career, and different perceptions towards one’s career. The home sphere is depicted through gendered division of household labor, unequal power within the household, and domestic violence.

**Keywords:** *Crazy Rich Asians, China Rich Girlfriend, Rich People’s Problems, Gender Inequality, Library Research, Contextual Analysis Method, Public Sphere, Home Sphere*

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of the Study

For centuries gender inequality has been an issue in society. A study undertaken by historian Gerda Lerner found that “gender inequality becomes ingrained in middle eastern societies by the second century Before Christ, as in Çatalhöyük, an ancient city that exists between 7100 BC to 5700 BC” (1987:32). As gender inequality issues are even apparent in this era, the spanning over nine centuries highlights the reason why it is important to study the subject. Clearly it has always been, and could always be, a critical societal issue and problem if equality is not achieved.

According to Wienclaw, “gender inequality is a term for unbalanced treatments that women and men receive, and those different treatments occur according to what society deems appropriate and suitable for their gender label” (2011:96).

Society often disregards other issues outside of the gender label. For example, an individual’s personal skills, abilities, and experiences which can often lead to the existence of strong barriers between men and women. Besides society, culture also plays an important role in the presence and implementation of gender inequality. According to Ridgeway, “the base of gender inequality is the cultural beliefs about gender stereotypes which assume that men are more naturally

competent than women” (2011:27). In Asia, for instance, parents are often the villains in the imposition of gender inequality as it is a part of their culture. As stated by Gupta, “discrimination against girls is mainly caused by cultural factors, such as the widespread practice of dowry payments, kinship patterns, and the marriage system” (1987:80). Those factors often lead to a preference for sons. Therefore, this belief allows a men-centered society to cause further damage to women, as the gap between men and women emerges.

According to Darity Jr., when elaborating about the cause of gender inequality:

The occurrence of gender inequality towards women is because women, for the most part, are better equipped to primarily have roles in domestic fields such as being a housewife, a mother or a homemaker, doing jobs that are not considered as influential, or the belief that these tasks have little to none of the big responsibilities of a family or society, because they are done inside the house, and are considered very womanly. (2008:624)

On the other hand, because men often work outside the family home, they are deemed to perform more valuable work. This phenomenon prevents women from being positioned equally to men in society because they are inhibited by this label and are unable to develop their true potential.

In literature, some authors use novel to privately expose and express their opinion on life issues, including social matters, such as gender inequality. Many authors from various parts of the world have used gender issues as a theme for their literary works. One such author is Kevin Kwan in his *Crazy Rich Asians* trilogy, i.e., *Crazy Rich Asians*, *China Rich Girlfriend* and *Rich People's Problem*.

The *Crazy Rich Asians* trilogy is a world-wide best-selling trinity known for its originality and ability to deliver a fresh storyline in the most entertaining and well-crafted ways. In its relationship to American Popular Culture, the *Crazy Rich Asians* trilogy was positioned at the top three of The New York Times's Bestseller-list in 2018 and 2019. It is important to highlight the fact that The New York Times is one of the most influential newspapers in America, if not in the world, therefore it does not only emphasize the credibility of the chosen literary work as a part of American culture, but it also underwrites the foundation of this study's worth and recognition.

This thesis identifies gender inequality's depiction in several scenes and events throughout the *Crazy Rich Asians* trilogy. Since the *Crazy Rich Asians* trilogy holds a strong familial and paternal background, the depictions of gender inequality are evidenced both in the home-sphere and the public-sphere. Family tends to encourage men's dominance over women, leading men to become the independent party; as stated by Lerner, "women's subordination has been primarily expressed in the form of paternalistic dominance within the structure of the family" (1986:241). Therefore, the writer will analyze both spheres to cover the relevant gender inequality issues within the trilogy.

## **1.2. Research Problems**

The research problems can be summarized in relation to:

1. the intrinsic elements, who are the flat and round characters, and what are the settings, and conflicts in the trilogy?
2. the extrinsic elements, how is gender inequality in the public-sphere depicted in the trilogy?
3. the extrinsic elements, and how is gender inequality in the home-sphere depicted in the trilogy?

### **1.3. Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study can be summarized as follows. To examine:

1. the intrinsic elements of the trilogy, defined as the characters, settings, and conflicts.
2. how gender inequality in the public-sphere is depicted in the trilogy as part of its extrinsic elements.
3. how gender inequality in the home-sphere is depicted in the trilogy as part of its extrinsic elements.

### **1.4. Previous Studies**

In the process of researching and preparing for this study, the writer identified at least four previous studies relating to *Crazy Rich Asians* completed by three undergraduate students from different universities in Indonesia.

The first previous study is *Social Class Domination over Proletarian Group in Kevin Kwan's "Crazy Rich Asians": Redefining Social Class Hierarchy as Familial and Cultural Traditions* done by Anindita Nikmatus Syva from Universitas Negeri Semarang in 2019. This study examines the portrayal of social class domination in the chosen literary work using Marxist theory. Syva asserts that, despite their modernity and high education, some wealthy Chinese families maintain their loyalty to familial and cultural traditions to protect their reputation and prosperity.

The second previous study is *Baker's Strategies Used in Translating English Idioms into Indonesian in "Crazy Rich Asians" by Kevin Kwan* done by Okta Maya Fitri, Abdurrachman Faridi, and Rudi Hartono from Universitas Negeri Semarang in 2019. This study focuses on finding the idioms contained in the chosen literary work, describing the types of the idioms, and translating them into Bahasa.

The third previous study is *Social Identity Expressions in Kevin Kwan's "Crazy Rich Asians"* done by Nailul Ifada and Zakiyatul Mufidah from University of Trunojoyo Madura in 2019. The writers of this study find that there at least two major ways to express the social identity of the wealthy Asian characters in the chosen literary work, involving owning luxury belongings and pursuing a high level of education in top rated universities across the globe.

The fourth previous study is *A Study of Code Mixing in English Novel "Crazy Rich Asians" by Kevin Kwan* done by Desi Eka Putri, Dr. Rita Sutjiati

Djohan and Dra. Endang Purwaningsih from Universitas Gunadarma in 2016. This study aims to understand the type of code-mixing that is applied in the chosen literary work and observes the reasons behind its usage. The writers of this study state that the first part of the novel is where code-mixing is most frequently applied, including alternation, insertion, and congruent lexicalization. They also find the reason behind the application of code-mixing is mainly to make the story more expressive.

The existence of the gender inequality is prevalent throughout the *Crazy Rich Asians* trilogy. This issue is broadly discussed globally, marking its importance. However, none of the previous studies discussed the portrayal of the gender inequality issue throughout the chosen literary work. Therefore, the gap between this study and the previous studies is the absence of an analysis of the portrayal of gender inequality in *Crazy Rich Asians* trilogy.

In relation to the gender inequality issue, the writer finds one previous study concerning this matter. It is *The Impact of Gender Inequality on Women as Reflected in George Gissing's "The Odd Women"* prepared by Berliana Ayu from Diponegoro University in 2019. This study focuses its attention on the forms and effects of gender inequality on women and the resistance shown in their thoughts and actions. Ayu finds that the gender inequality occurred both in the public-sphere and home-sphere.

Although the core problem of the chosen issue between this study and the previous study is the same - the literary work where the issue is found is different. Therefore, it fills the gap between the previous study and this study.

### **1.5. Scope of the Study**

This study involves an analysis of both intrinsic and extrinsic aspects of the trilogy. For the intrinsic part, this study analyzes four characters of the trilogy whose existence impacts, or are impacted, by gender inequality; they are Eddie Cheng, Fiona Tung, Michael Teo, and Astrid Leong. These characters are chosen based on their marital and/or paternal relationships which play the most significant roles in depicting gender inequalities.

This study also analyzes the settings which involve the time, place, and environment. The final intrinsic element that will be analyzed is conflict which involves both internal conflict and external conflict. For the extrinsic part, this study examines how gender inequality is depicted in the *Crazy Rich Asians* trilogy in the context of public sphere and home sphere. Regarding the public sphere, this study examines labor force which includes gendered job segregation, unequal chance for a career, and different perceptions towards one's career. Meanwhile, for the home sphere this study examines gendered division of household labor, unequal power, and domestic violence.

## **1.6. Writing Organization of the Study**

This study is divided into four chapters as follows:

### **CHAPTER I**

#### **Introduction**

Acting as an introduction to the study, the first chapter contains the background of the study, research problems, objectives of the study, highlights of the previous studies, scope of the study, and the writing organization of the study.

### **CHAPTER II**

#### **Theories and Methods**

The second chapter showcases the theories used to guide the process of systematic analysis. This chapter consists of the intrinsic element theories; theories about the characters, the settings, and conflicts, and the extrinsic theories; as well as the theories about the manifestations and causes of gender inequality. This chapter also showcases the research methods used throughout the study.

**CHAPTER III****Results and Discussions**

Chapter three is the discussion, analysis and results section of the study that provides data to find answers to the research questions and problems stated above.

**CHAPTER IV****Conclusions**

As the final chapter, the fourth chapter provides the conclusions of the study by restating the key issues (problems) and summarizing the findings within the study.

## CHAPTER II

### THEORIES AND METHODS

#### 2.1. Intrinsic Elements

This subchapter contains theories of the intrinsic elements. They are character, settings, and conflict.

##### 2.1.1. Character

In terms of the theory of character, the writer of this study chooses to quote Abrams's definition:

Characters are the persons represented in a dramatic or narrative work, who are interpreted by the reader as being endowed with particular moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities by inferences from what the persons say and their distinctive ways of saying it—the dialogue—and from what they do—the action. (1999: 32-33).

It can be divided into two groups, which are flat characters and round characters. According to E.M. Forster, “flat characters in their purest form are constructed around a single idea or quality: when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round” (1927:48). On the other hand, “a round character is complex in temperament and motivation and is represented with subtle particularity” (1999:33).

### **2.1.2. Settings**

According to Abrams, “the overall setting of a narrative or dramatic work is the general locale, historical time, and social circumstances in which its action occurs” (1999:284). This statement is also supported by Thrall’s view “setting consists of the physical composition background, the time period background, and the atmosphere background of the story” (1960:453). Therefore, it can be concluded that setting can be divided into three major dimensions. They are setting of the place, setting of the time, and setting of the environment.

### **2.1.3. Conflict**

According to Perrine, “conflict is a clash of action, desire, ideas, or goods in the plot of a story or drama. It can be both physical, such as physical fighting, and mental, such as emotionally expressing a different view” (1988:1408). In terms of its occurrence, Meyer divided conflict into internal and external. “Internal conflict happens within the character, most of the times the conflict involves moral and psychological issues. Thus, it be solved by the character itself” (2011: 52). On the other hand, “external conflict is not just between man against man, but the protagonist is also against nature and society as well” (2011: 51).

## **2.2. Extrinsic Elements**

This subchapter contains theories of the extrinsic element being gender inequality both in the public and home sphere.

### **2.2.1. Gender**

According to Wienclaw, “gender – or the psychological, social, cultural, and behavioral characteristics associated with being female or male – is a learned characteristic based on one’s gender identity and learned gender role” (2011:16). It creates barriers between men and women with regards to how they play their roles where inequality arises as a result of gender stereotypes. Wienclaw defined gender stereotype as “culturally defined patterns of expected attitudes and behavior that are considered appropriate for one gender but not the other” (2011:16).

### **2.2.2. Gender Inequality**

According to Wienclaw, “the term “gender inequality” refers to the disparities between women and men based solely on their gender rather than objective differences in skills, abilities, or other characteristics” (2011: 96). She added, “these inequalities may be obvious (e.g., not receiving the same pay for the same job) or subtle (e.g., not being given the same subjective opportunities for advancement)” (2011:96).

### **2.2.3. The Cause of Gender Inequality**

Gender inequality is a learned and reinforced behavior. Viewing gender inequality from the perspectives of four major frameworks could show the cause of gender inequality itself. According to Wienclaw, first, “liberal feminists, for example, posit that gender inequality has its origins in historical traditions that have set up barriers to the advancement of women” (2011:97). She added, “as with

socialist perspectives on other aspects of culture and society, the socialist feminist perspective posits that women's oppression is a result of capitalism" (2011:98). She also stated "an even more radical view of gender inequality comes from the radical feminists. In this view, patriarchy is seen as the primary cause of the oppression of women" (2011:98). As for the fourth perspective, she stated "further, multiracial feminism points out the fact that there is no such thing as a common experience for all women. Rather, women's experiences are further complicated by other variables including race and class" (2011:99).

#### **2.2.4. Gender Inequality Manifestations**

In studying the portrayal of gender inequality in the chosen novel trilogy, the writer chooses to focus on the home sphere rather than public sphere. Gender inequality in the home sphere in this study is frequently depicted through events between a married couple and familial issues. On the other hand, gender inequality in public sphere in this study is depicted through work-related events.

##### **2.2.4.1. Public Sphere Gender Inequality**

Generally, gender inequality in public spheres mainly relates to political, economic and to the labor force. However, since the public sphere in this study is depicted through work-related events, the writer will focus on labor force.

### **2.2.4.1.1. Labor Force**

One of the major issues of gender inequality in the public sphere is women's rights in the workplace where they are prevented due to the existence of job segregation. Segregation labels jobs to be fulfilled only by a certain gender.

Ridgeway states that:

When a certain type of profession is filled with a lot of one sexual category rather than the other, that profession has already contaminated with job segregation that prevents men and women to have the same position and power in paid labor. (2011: 97)

This creates limitations of job options for women, where, for example, women are expected to only be teachers because it is considered as a job that needs a women's nurturing ability. The idea of job segregation is supported by Darrity Jr. who states that:

Women for the most part are set to primarily have roles in domestic field such as being a wife, a mother or a homemaker, labors that are not considered as influential or has a little to none of the big responsibilities by society because they are done inside the house and are very womanly, unlike men who do work outside the home, which is considered a heavy and more valuable work. (2008:624).

On top of that, Wienclaw also states:

Traditionally, there has been a division of labor based on gender (i.e., women have the primary responsibility for childcare while men work outside the home). This division of labor arose due to the fact that the physical capacities of women (e.g., their size, shape, and strength), their psychological and psychological makeup (hypothetically), and their reproductive biology made them less fit for hunting and war than men. (2011:129)

However, Darrity Jr also added that “unlike men, even though men do the same work as women, their work will be considered more prestigious and better than when women do it” (2008:648). This phenomenon is then proven by Linda Lindsey, where, according to her research, “teaching occupations were initially dominated by men before the occurrence of the Civil War, but the population of men decreased after that. Therefore, women started to outgrow the domination” (Lindsey, 2016). However, and unfortunately, women did not receive the same compensation and privileges as men.

#### **2.2.4.2. Home-Sphere Gender Inequality**

When it comes to gender inequality in the home sphere and in the context of marriage, this study uses the concept of gendered division labor in the household as an indication of women’s position in a marriage. This study also identifies the act of domestic violence to evidence the struggles that some of the women characters in the trilogy had to endure.

##### **2.2.4.2.1. Gendered Division of Household Labor**

Society has always normalized women to have more home-related duties than men. Tai and Treas stated that, “women everywhere spend more time on housework than men. However, their work in managing the household is not valued as much by society” (2013:780). This statement is supported by Wienclaw, “since the work of women in the home is typically devalued by many cultures, the adjustment to equally shared domestic tasks is often more difficult for men to make

than for women” (2011:80). According to Linda Lindsey, this is due to “the work of women is considered a hidden occupation, or it can be interpreted as work that does not show the significance economic value compared to men” (2016: 315). Ridgeway also added “the gendered division of labor in the domestic sphere becomes the key reason that makes gender inequality continue to thrive” (2011:138).

#### **2.2.4.2.2. Unequal Power**

The unequal power between men and women in the household commonly exists in traditional family or marriage principles. Men are put as the head of the family, with women filling the second position. According to Frost and Dodoo, “empirical evidence shows that disparities between men and women in household decision-making are pervasive and less favourable to women” (2010), which is the inevitable result of men having more perceived power than women domestically.

#### **2.2.4.2.3. Domestic Violence**

According to Khaing, “marriage is deemed as a way for women to be socially and economically protected and cared for by male” (1984). In contrast to that, some women suffer domestic violence, instead of obtaining protection. This is reflected by some of the women characters in the trilogy.

Domestic violence is not always executed physically, therefore it is not always defined as a physical abuse. According to Walker:

The types of abuse in domestic violence can be categorized into five basic types; they are physical abuse, verbal abuse or psychological abuse making it a non-physical abuse, sexual abuse, property violence abuse, and stalking abuse. (1984).

According to Gelles & Straus, “physical abuse is the most common global abuse; any act that carries the intention of hurting another person physically is considered as physical abuse” (1988). This study also covers verbal abuse or psychological abuse, widely known as emotional abuse. According to Schechter, “there are five tenets of emotional abuse; they are isolation, humiliation and degradation, crazy-making behavior, threats of physical harm, and suicidal and homicidal threats” (1982).

### **2.3. Research Methods**

The writer chose to apply the feminism approach to this study. According to Bell Hooks, “feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression” (1984). It is also stated by Tong that “the oppression is given through a false belief that women are less intellectually and physically capable than men” (2014:2). This approach is chosen because the writer believes gender inequality is one of the main concerns in the feminist movement, and it is portrayed several times in the chosen literary works. This is supported by Wienclaw’s statement, “feminists attempt to understand the nature of women in society in order to bring about social change that will liberate women from being an oppressed minority and bring them parity with men.” (2011:97).

### **2.3.1. Data and Data Source**

In this study, the original data is a trilogy of *Crazy Rich Asians* by Kevin Kwan. As for the secondary data, it was collected by the writer from various sources such as books and journals.

### **2.3.2. Method of Data Collection**

To collect the data, the writer chose to apply the library research method. According to Mary W. George, “library research includes collecting data and information as well as opinion of experts that are related to the subject of the study” (2008:6). The collected data was then classified in order to endorse the ones that are relevant to the study.

### **2.3.3. Method of Data Analysis**

The collected data is analyzed by applying the contextual analysis method. Behrendt stated that:

The contextual analysis method is an analysis that focuses not only the context of a written work's historical, cultural, or psychological background, but also its textual qualities that make the text 'a text', such as settings, characters, and theme. (2008)

In short, it combines its intrinsic elements with its extrinsic elements. In this study, the contextual analysis method is achieved by combining the analysis of characters, settings and the conflict of the trilogy which act as its intrinsic elements with the gender inequality issue which acts as its extrinsic element.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

#### **3.1. Intrinsic Elements**

In this subchapter, the results and discussions contain intrinsic elements They are characters, settings, and conflict.

##### **3.1.1. Characters**

In this study, the first intrinsic element results and discussions is character, which is divided into flat character and round character.

###### **3.1.1.1. Flat Character**

In terms of flat character, the writer chooses three characters of the trilogy who fit into the category. They are Eddie Cheng, Fiona Tung, and Rachel Chu.

###### **3.1.1.1.1. Eddie Cheng**

Edison, as known as Eddie, is one of the main characters of the trilogy. He is the first son of the Cheng Family, considered as one of the wealthiest and most influential families in Singapore. Being born into a crazy amount of wealth, the author projects his character from the beginning of the story to be extravagant and extremely spoiled to the point where it is quite worrying. As stated on page 45 of the trilogy when the narrator describes Eddie:

And then there was Eddie, their firstborn. To all appearances, Edison Cheng was “the perfect one.” He had breezed through Cambridge Judge Business School with distinction, done a stint at Cazenove in London, and was now a rising star in Hong Kong’s private banking world. He had married Fiona Tung, who hailed from a politically connected family, and they had three very studious, well-behaved children. But privately, Alexandra worried the most about Eddie. In the last few years, he was spending far too much time hanging around with these dubious Mainland Chinese billionaires, flying all over Asia every week to attend parties, and she worried how this might be affecting his health and his family life. (Kwan, 2013:45)

Despite being born into wealth, he is never satisfied with what he has.

“Despite this embarrassment of riches, Eddie felt extremely deprived compared to most of his friends” (Kwan, 2013:69). His habit of comparing his life in terms of wealth to his fellow affluent connections results in him becoming both an ungrateful man and an insecure one. He projects his insecurity by fulfilling his desire to always appear as picture-perfect in every magazine that he and his little family are displayed in. This strong desire results in him being abusive to his own family, from criticizing what his wife wears, to yelling at his own children when they create minor inconveniences that affect his ‘perfection’. Due to his obsession, his character is filled with only a single idea which conforms to the flat character category.

#### **3.1.1.1.2. Fiona Tung**

Fiona is a beautiful woman born in Hong Kong, with three young children and is married to Eddison Cheng, “...he had married Fiona Tung, who hailed from a politically connected family, and they had three very studious, well-behaved children” (Kwan, 2015:45). Fiona’s socio-economic background is just as

influential as her husband's because she is considered part of Hong Kong's "old money".

Her personality is vastly different to Eddie's. Fiona is a religious woman; "well, for one thing, unlike some of the members of Stratosphere, Fiona is a true Christian who believes in the power of redemption..." (Kwan, 2015:279). Her strong belief helps her to be more caring and forgiving. Hence, from the start of the story, she always tries to avoid conflicts with her husband. For instance, when Eddie complains about simple things, Fiona chooses to ignore the complaints rather than arguing with her husband, "Fiona just stood there, not wanting to argue with him over the obvious" (Kwan, 2013:198). From the beginning until the end, Fiona manages to stay calm despite the havoc that her husband causes. Hence, Fiona's character also conforms to the category of a flat character.

### **3.1.1.1.3. Rachel Chu**

Rachel Chu is one of the main characters of the trilogy. Despite being born in Mainland China, Rachel spends most of her upbringing in America. Hence, Rachel's character radiates more American culture than Asian, as described by Astrid in a dialogue: "Taiwanese? Not at all. She seems completely Americanized to me," Astrid offered, before regretting what she'd said" (Kwan, 2013:53). In America, Rachel becomes an economic development professor, a top-notch one in fact, as stated by Astrid: "Yes, definitely. I'm told she's one of the up-and-coming professors in her field" (Kwan, 2013:53) when she describes Rachel. Despite being

a brainy type, Rachel is deemed humble, as described by Astrid: “Rachel is intelligent and capable, and completely down-to-earth. I think you’ll like her very much” (Kwan, 2013:53) hence why many other characters get along with her easily. Colin Koo, for instance, admitted that he likes Rachel instantly on their first encounter, “she could see that I liked Rachel instantly” (Kwan, 2013:119).

Although liked by many, Rachel’s character also faces conflicts with some other characters in the trilogy, especially those who do not approve of her relationship with Nick. One such character is Eleanor Young, none other than Nick’s mother, who at the beginning is very much against Rachel. This is proven by the way she describes Rachel in the first novel: “A cunning, calculating older woman” (Kwan, 2013:53). However, Eleanor’s treatment towards Rachel becomes incredibly supportive and positive once she knows that Rachel is a lovely figure who is loved deeply by her own son. Eventually, in the second novel of the trilogy, Eleanor gives her blessing for Nick to marry Rachel, as she remarks: “I did not come here to stop your wedding. I have no intention of doing that. In fact, I want you to marry Rachel” (Kwan, 2015:108).

From the beginning of the story until the end, Rachel always carries herself with poise and dignity. This single idea within Rachel’s character, that she is an intelligent woman who is down to earth, does not change throughout the trilogy. Therefore, Rachel’s character fits into the flat character category.

### **3.1.1.2. Round Character**

In terms of round character, the writer chooses three characters of the trilogy who fit into this category. They are Michael Teo, Astrid Leong, and Nick Young.

#### **3.1.1.2.1. Michael Teo**

Michael's character, according to how he is described by the author of the trilogy, is a handsome man who is married to Astrid. However, before being married to the beloved and well-known Astrid Leong, Michael was a nobody to the Singaporean upper-class society, as stated by the author: "he was a complete unknown, the son of schoolteachers from the then middle-class neighborhood of Toa Payoh" (Kwan, 2013:64). Although coming from a relatively ordinary family background, also in terms of wealth, Michael achieves a reputable career and appearance as described early in the trilogy, "...a fiercely handsome Armed Forces Elite Commando who was a National Merit Scholar and a Caltech-trained computer systems specialist" (Kwan, 2013:64). However, being married to the daughter of one of the most influential families in Singapore overshadows his achievement to the point where he feels irrelevant. This is proven by the way Astrid's family members often treat Michael condescendingly, particularly during family gatherings. An example is when Astrid's brother makes fun of Michael: "yes, don't we all wish we could have Astrid's clothing budget and Michael's eight-pack!" Astrid's brother Alexander quipped" (Kwan, 2013:80).

Michael has had to face a condescending tone towards him by his in-laws and the rest of the ‘affluent’ people since the beginning of his marriage, which results in his change of behavior once he has access to wealth. Michael was once a gentleman who loved his wife, cared for his son, and is respectful. However, after his technology company successfully floated on the stock market, earning him millions of dollars, he changes into someone who is rather a snob. These claims are proven in the second novel when Michael shows his eagerness to control even the smallest things. One night, as someone who never cared about fashion, he suddenly tells his wife what to wear:

Astrid shot Michael a look. Had aliens secretly abducted her husband and replaced him with some finicky fashion editor? In the six years they had been married, Michael had never made a single comment about what she wore. (Kwan, 2013:196)

This statement, made by the author, shows how Michael’s character develops demonstrating that he fits the round character category.

#### **3.1.1.2.2. Astrid Leong**

Astrid Leong is a beautiful woman who was born into the Leong family, one of the most influential families in Singapore. Her socio-economic background is well-described by the narrator:

And that was the other, more essential detail about Astrid: she was born into the uppermost echelon of Asian wealth—a secretive, rarefied circle of

families virtually unknown to outsiders who possessed immeasurably vast fortunes (Kwan, 2013:42)

She is Michael Teo's wife and a mother to a young child named Cassian.

As a wife and a mother, Astrid is a loving and caring figure. In addition, she is also a considerate person evidenced by how the author showcases her actions throughout the trilogy. For instance, she is fully aware that she is married to someone whose socio-economic status is way below her own, hence, she sacrifices her comfort and lives in a rather tiny space to make her husband not feel inadequate. To some extent, she also hides her valuable belongings to safeguard her husband's feelings as shown in page 61 of the first trilogy novel:

After tucking Cassian into bed and reading him *Bonsoir Lune*, Astrid resumed the ritual of carefully unpacking her new couture acquisitions and hiding them away in the spare bedroom before Michael got home. (She was careful never to let her husband see the full extent of her purchases every season.) (Kwan, 2013:61).

However, when her marriage begins to fail, she no longer tries to sacrifice her comfort to protect her husband's inferiority, clearly shown by the narrative that the author explicitly writes in the second novel, "Astrid realized how much she had struggled to change for Michael, and how much she no longer wanted to" (Kwan, 2015:346). This change of behavior is what makes her character conform to the round character category.

### **3.1.1.2.3. Nick Young**

Nicholas Young, as known as Nick, is one of the main characters of the trilogy. He is the only son of the Young Family, which makes him the only heir to

the family's significant fortune. However, despite the future rights to this huge fortune, he is rather reserved about it, as stated by his best friend, Colin, in the first novel: "Colin shook his head. "Nicky, Nicky, this is why I love you. You are the only person in all of Asia who does not realize how rich you are, or should I say, how rich you will be one day. Here, hand over your wallet." (Kwan, 2013:120). Therefore, his character is described both through the narrative of the story, and the dialogues, as a humble affluent man.

In the first novel, the author described Nick's affection towards his family, particularly his grandmother, through a narrative based on Rachel Chu's point of view: "She was touched to see how caring Nick seemed to be with his grandmother, holding the old lady's hands as he whispered into her ear" (Kwan, 2013:158). However, Nick's behavior changes when his grandmother does not permit him to marry the woman he loves, Rachel Chu, as stated by the grandmother herself:

No matter, Nicky," his grandmother smiled. "I do not give you permission to marry her. Now let's stop all this nonsense and go home. I don't want to be stuck having dinner here, when the cook hasn't prepared properly for me. I'm sure she didn't get any fresh fish today. (Kwan, 2013:347).

After the incident, Nick blatantly snapped at his grandmother, "Nick was livid. "Ah Ma, it's taken me about twenty years, but I finally understand why Dad moved to Sydney! He can't stand being around you!" Su Yi put down her teacup, stunned by what her favorite grandson had just said." (Kwan, 2013:349). Based on this

incident, Nick's change of behavior towards his family, especially his grandmother throughout the trilogy, is what makes his character fit into the round character category.

### **3.1.2. Setting**

In terms of setting, it consists of three different elements. They are the settings of place, time, and environment.

#### **3.1.2.1. Setting of Place**

*Crazy Rich Asians* trilogy's setting of place varies around the world, from Europe; London and Paris, to America; and New York in particular. However, the scenes are mostly in Asia, primarily Singapore and mainland China.

The first novel includes a scene in London, "Nicholas Young slumped into the nearest seat in the hotel lobby, drained from the sixteen-hour flight from Singapore, the train ride from Heathrow Airport, and trudging through the rain-soaked streets" (Kwan, 2013:9). At that time, Nick, Astrid, Eddie, and their mothers are about to check in into a luxurious hotel, The Calthorpe, which is supposed to be one of the best hotels in London, but they are not allowed to check in due to their Asian origins. This location plays an important role in the trilogy because this is where the writer introduces the incredible amount of wealth held by many of the characters, "no, no mistake at all. I sold the Calthorpe a short while ago, lock, stock,

and barrel. May I present the new mistress, Mrs. Felicity Leong” (Kwan, 2013:15). Mrs. Leong is one of the mothers.

The next important setting of place of the trilogy is in New York, as written below the title of the chapter “*Nicholas Young and Rachel Chu— New York, 2010*” (Kwan, 2013:18). New York plays an important role as the setting of place in this trilogy because it is where Nick and Rachel, as the main characters of the trilogy, initially meet each other until they have a relationship. Both Nick and Rachel are professors in the New York University. As professors, they do not earn enough to live a lavish lifestyle, therefore they live as ‘ordinary’ people in New York, “the ordinary life they shared as two young college professors in New York bore no resemblance to the life of imperial splendor that Nick seemed to lead here, and Rachel didn’t know how to reconcile the two” (Kwan, 2013:167).

As one of the best destinations in the world, wealthy people including the characters in the trilogy love to go to Paris. Hence, Paris is one of the other most important setting of places. One particular character that loves Paris deeply to the point where she claims it as her second home is Astrid Leong.

Every May 1, the L’Herme-Pierres—one of France’s great banking families—would host Le Bal du Muguet, a sumptuous ball that was the highlight of the spring social season. This year, as Astrid entered the arched passageway leading into the L’Herme-Pierres’ splendid hôtel particulier on Île Saint-Louis, she was handed a delicate sprig of flowers by a footman in smart black-and-gold livery. (Kwan, 2013:38)

Other than to attend important events, such as galas, balls, and fashion shows, some of the characters also love to visit Paris to splurge their wealth. Hence, Paris is mentioned many times throughout the trilogy.

When it comes to the second novel, the general setting of *China Rich Girlfriend* takes place in Asia, especially China, Hong Kong, and Singapore. As for China, the beginning of the story occurs in Beijing, where Eddie and Mrs. Bao meet each other.

Barely thirty minutes earlier, Eddie had been on another plane parked in a private hangar at Beijing Capital International Airport, taking in the grim details during a hastily arranged crisis-management meeting with Mr. Tin, the gray-haired head of security for the Bao family, and Nigel Tomlinson, his bank's Asia chief. (Kwan, 2015:11)

Beside Beijing, Shanghai also plays a prominent role as the setting of place because Shanghai is where Rachel is supposed to have a dinner with her biological father's side of family, as shown in page 136 of the trilogy.

Hong Kong plays an important role as the setting of place because there are several important meetings held there. One such event is an art exhibition in the Mandarin Hotel, "Which is precisely how Corinna Ko-Tung came to be sitting in the Clipper Lounge of the Mandarin Hotel in Hong Kong a year later, impatiently awaiting the arrival of Lester and Valerie Liu" (Kwan, 2015:25).

Similar to the previous novel of the trilogy, *China Rich Girlfriend* also takes place in Europe, at least in Italy and Paris. In page 142, Astrid is in Venice to attend

a dinner party, “she was there for the Venice Biennale, and they were being rowed to the Palazzo Brandolini for a dinner party honoring Anish Kapoor” (Kwan, 2015:142). When it comes to Paris, it is mentioned in page 251 that Rachel and Nick go to Paris with Colette Bing and her friends, “traveling to Paris Colette Bing–style was like entering an alternate universe” (Kwan, 2015:251).

When compared to the previous two novels of the trilogy, *Rich People’s Problems* has more variety in relation to its settings of place. The story takes place in The Bahamas, Switzerland, Paris, New York, India, Shanghai, Hong Kong, London, Surrey, Palawan, Belgium, and Singapore.

However, the most prominent place of the trilogy is at Tyersall Park in Singapore. This is because Tyersall Park is a place where almost all the ‘affluent’ characters of the trilogy grew up. Hence, it is also the location where the most important events of the story take place. One such event is the death of Shang Su Yi in her very own bedroom.

When I went into the bedroom, Catherine was sitting by her bedside, and I noticed that someone had opened all the windows and curtains. Su Yi usually prefers the curtains drawn in the afternoons, to protect her antique furniture from the setting sun, so I began to close them. Leave them, Catherine said. I looked over at her and began to ask why, and that’s when I realized that Su Yi was gone. (Kwan, 2015:235).

Su Yi’s death in Tyersall Park plays an especially important role as the setting of place because every family member, from her children to her grandchildren, fight over who will inherit the property.

However, when it comes to linking the settings of place to the topic of this study, those places mentioned above have no relevance to the actual ‘gender inequality’ practices. This is because the ‘gender inequality’ practices mostly occur inside the residences of the respective characters who impact, or are impacted, by gender inequality.

### **3.1.2.2. Setting of Time**

*Crazy Rich Asian* trilogy’s setting of time occurs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, the setting of time is divided into three different timelines. Regarding the first novel, *Crazy Rich Asians*, the setting of time is year 2010 as shown below the title of the first chapter, namely “Nicholas Young and Rachel Chu; New York, 2010” (2013:18) and also written as “SINGAPORE, 2010” (Kwan, 2013:166) in chapter five. During the year 2010, a lot of events took place, starting from Nick’s invitation for Rachel to visit Singapore, “you sure about this?” Rachel asked again, blowing softly on the surface of her steaming cup of tea. They were sitting at their usual window table at Tea & Sympathy, and Nick had just invited her to spend the summer with him in Asia” (Kwan, 2013:18), to moments when Rachel faced many struggles after she eventually arrived in Singapore. When it comes to the second novel, *China Rich Girlfriend*, the setting of time is year 2013, “it is 2013, and I am not going to get married and pump out babies just because you want a barrel full of grandsons” (Kwan, 2015:300). As for the last novel of the trilogy, *Rich People’s Problems*, the setting of time is year 2015 as shown explicitly in the first chapter,

“HARBOUR ISLAND, THE BAHAMAS, JANUARY 21, 2015” (2017:12).

Similar to the previous two novels, a lot happens within a one-year time frame.

However, the key event is Shang Su Yi’s death, as written in an obituary column,

“HANG SU YI, Mrs. James Young (1919–2015)” (Kwan, 2017:242).

### **3.1.2.3. Setting of the Environment**

The environment of the trilogy showcases an abundance of wealth. However, the social classes presented in the trilogy also include those who come from a middle-class, as well as a working-class background. The main characters are mostly the upper-class, namely The Young, The Leong and The Shang clans. As for the middle-class, characters are represented by Rachel Chu who is an economy professor, Michael Teo who used to work in the Ministry of Defense, and Kitty Pong who was once an opera artist. When it comes to the working-class, it is represented by the Thai maids, the Indian guards, and the Indonesian caretakers, who all work for the affluent in the trilogy.

### **3.1.3. Conflict**

In this study, the results and discussions of conflict are divided into two types. They are internal and external conflict.

### 3.1.3.1. Internal Conflict

In the trilogy, Michael Teo experiences internal conflict. Since Michael comes from a relatively middle-class family, he strongly feels inadequate as the husband of Astrid Leong, who comes from a much better-off family background. The adequacy had been well-hidden, until an outburst of his feelings to Astrid:

I thought, what the hell, this is the most beautiful girl I've ever met. I'll never be this lucky again. But then reality hit ... and things got to be too much. It just got worse, year after year, and I tried, I really tried, Astrid, but I can't face it anymore. You don't have a clue what it's like being married to Astrid Leong. Not you, Astrid, but everyone's idea of you. I could never live up to it. (Kwan, 2013:352).

His insecurity of inadequacy affects his personality, and the way his family's story is presented in the trilogy. This matches the topic of the study as it develops into the depiction of gender inequality. Hence, his internal conflict plays a big role.

Other than Michael, Astrid also experiences internal conflict. There is one night in the story when Michael goes to have a shower and Astrid accidentally reads a text message on Michael's phone, assuming it was her phone that made a notification tone. In that message, Astrid finds a rather seductive text, apparently from a female, which shocks her. From that time on, she can't stop thinking of that particular night and her questioning becomes her internal conflict, "or was it with someone else? Who was that someone else? Since the night she had discovered that text message, she couldn't stop asking herself these questions" (Kwan, 2013:82).

### 3.1.3.2. External Conflict

One of the external conflicts in the trilogy occurs between Michael and Astrid's family members after their marriage. Due to Michael's insignificant familial and financial background, his in-laws do not acknowledge him. During a family dinner, Michael is treated as a laughingstock.

...you know my ten-year-old granddaughter Bella absolutely worships you ever since her last trip to Singapore she's always saying, Ah Ma, when I grow up, I want to be just like Astrid. I asked why and she says, because she always dresses like a movie star and that Michael is such a hunk! Everyone at the table roared with laughter. (Kwan, 2013:80)

Apart from being treated as a laughingstock, Michael is also treated as a mere handyman. This is because he used to work in the Ministry of Defense as a programmer. However, despite the seriousness of his job, the in-laws use his skill to fix electronics, as if his job does not mean anything. For instance, "...can you stop by the house this weekend? There's something wrong with Zachary's Xbox. I hope you can fix it..." (2013:80).

Sick of being treated as a handyman by the in-laws, Michael eventually reacts to one of them. When Michael attends another family dinner, Cathleen is about to ask him to fix the high-tech oven in the kitchen. However, instead of helping like he used to always do, he yells instead, "Michael glared at his sister-in-law. "Cathleen, I have a master's degree from Caltech, specializing in encryption technology. I'm not your fucking handyman!" (2013:264), which shows his character development throughout the story.

Similar to Michael, Astrid also experiences external conflict caused by people's expectation towards her. As the only daughter of the Leong family, she is immediately expected to maintain a certain standard of prominence, and this causes public scrutiny. Her married life is no exception, as shown when the narrator describes the talk of the town:

But to her friends and family, Astrid's current domestic situation was a perplexing one. Why was she popping into kitchens talking to cooks, unpacking luggage by herself, or worrying about her husband's workload? This was certainly not how anyone would have imagined Astrid's life to be. Astrid Leong was meant to be the chatelaine of a great house. (Kwan, 2013:62)

The public scrutiny plays a big role in Astrid's life, affecting her personal affairs and leading to scandals and domestic violence. Hence, her external conflict is relevant to the topic of this study.

## **3.2. Extrinsic Elements**

The extrinsic element of this study is the depictions of gender inequality both in the public and home sphere.

### **3.2.1. Depictions of Gender Inequality**

In this study, the manifestations of gender inequality are applied in both the public sphere and the home sphere. The public sphere covers the labor force, meanwhile the domestic sphere covers the labor division of the household and domestic violence. The following provides an explanation of each.

### **3.2.1.1. Public Sphere**

One of the most prominent places where gender inequality exists in the public sphere is through labor force, which is explained as follows:

#### **3.2.1.1.1. Labor Force**

Gender inequality in terms of the labor force is apparent in the way there is job segregation with the women characters in the trilogy.

##### **3.2.1.1.1.1. Gendered Job Segregation**

Job segregation applies when the description of the women characters' job only seems to fit to one gender's natural ability and is filled with only one gender abundantly. Throughout the trilogy, an occupation such as a consultant for people who are keen to climb the social ladder, is filled only by women characters. For instance, "in short, she was a special consultant for social climbers" (Kwan, 2015:25). The word 'she' refers to Corina Tung who was born to one of Hong Kong's most esteemed families which grants her extensive connections with the most eligible and exclusive people. However, with all the resources and education she has, she becomes a 'consultant' for social climbers which would not be considered a suitable occupation for the men characters in the trilogy. Another example is Roxanne who is working as an assistant to one of the well-known Chinese fashion icons. "Roxanne Wang, Colette's fabulous assistant, who is just killing it in a Rick Owens DRKSHDW black denim suit, just informed me that the beading on the snake is actually rubies" (Kwan, 2015:228). As an assistant to a

fashion icon, her job is to make arrangements, as shown in page 157, when Colette and her friends are going to eat in a Taiwanese restaurant that becomes very popular, and which requires an exclusive entrance, “let me text Roxanne—she’ll arrange for us to get in through the back door. I’m done meeting my public for today,” Colette declared” (Kwan, 2015:157). Other than making arrangements, she is also required to take photos of the fashion icon and share it on social media as a way to keep the fans entertained, “do you notice how Colette gets Roxanne to take pictures of her everywhere we go? She just tweets or blogs about every place, and the rest of us eat for free. It’s quite a racket” (Kwan, 2015:182). These jobs require the women characters to use their nurturing ability which, at the same time, proves why the men characters in the trilogy do not place themselves in the same job category. In contrast with the women, the men characters in the trilogy have much more reputable jobs, an example being Eddie Cheng. Both Corinna and Eddie were born into wealth, but instead of being a mere assistant for the nouveau rich who try to climb in social status, Eddie becomes a top-notch private banker who works for Lichtenburg as the Head of the Hong Kong Office. “Eleanor knew of course that her husband’s nephew worked for the Liechtenburg Group, but Eddie was head of the Hong Kong office, and never would she imagine running into him here” (Kwan, 2015:17). Instead of taking pictures of a fashion icon and sharing them to social media, making arrangements about back doors, or taking care of the bills in restaurants, Eddie’s job requires him to do something that is more ‘serious’, as described in the second novel of the trilogy, “he had spent the past eight years

managing the Bao family's offshore accounts, but they were such a secretive lot, he had never met any of them until today" (Kwan, 2015:10). In addition, as a private banker, Eddie's clients are affluent people such as Carlton's father, Bao Gaoliang, who is one of the richest men in mainland China. "Eddie couldn't hide his look of surprise. Mrs. Bao's husband, Bao Gaoliang, was one of Beijing's top politicians, and what's more, he had inherited one of China's biggest pharmaceutical firms" (Kwan, 2015:10). Throughout the story, occupations such as a banker, politician, or any other reputable positions are only filled by the male characters, although, essentially, the female characters could also have the credentials. This includes having an equal education. This proves that there is job segregation based on gender within this trilogy. In addition, the women characters mostly have jobs that require their womanly traits, despite their education and valuable connections, which proves Darrity Jr's theory on how women are set to the labors that are not deemed as influential, also based on the impact they make to society.

#### **3.1.1.1.1.2. Unequal Chance for a Career**

Gender inequality in terms of labor force is also apparent in the way that the women characters are mostly housewives, though not all, while the men characters have more desirable careers. As stated in the first novel of the trilogy where the husband is a heart surgeon, a career considered as reputable, "Dr. Malcolm Cheng was Asia's most esteemed heart surgeon" (Kwan, 2013:43). Unlike the husband, and although he comes from an affluent family, the wife is merely a housewife.

This was something his well-brought-up wife, the former Alexandra “Alix” Young of Singapore, felt to be overly ostentatious, so she preferred to call for a taxi wherever possible and allow her husband the exclusive use of his car and driver. “After all,” she was keen to say, “he’s saving people’s lives every day and I’m just a housewife.” This self-deprecation was standard behavior for Alexandra, even though she was the true architect of their fortune. (Kwan, 2013:44)

“A ‘full-time mother’, Cecilia actually spent more time on the international equestrian circuit than raising their son, Jake” (Kwan, 2013:45), is another example of the women characters in this trilogy not having the same reputable careers as the men; as stated in the same line, “...Tony, an Australian commodities trader whom Malcolm and Alexandra secretly nicknamed “the Convict” (Kwan, 2013:45). From those two examples, the inequality can be seen in how both the women and the men come from relatively similar backgrounds, in this case financially, yet they end up living two vastly different ways of lives; one working, while the other one stays at home.

Moreover, some of the women characters are not even expected to have a career at all. All they have to do is to marry rich men, and the richer the better. This idea is ingrained for generations and applies to almost all the affluent characters whose origin is from Singapore, as stated in the first novel of the trilogy:

After graduating with honors (anything less would bring shame to the family), you practiced your vocation (for not more than three years) before marrying a boy from a suitable family at the age of twenty-five (twenty-eight if you went to med school). At this point, you gave up your career to have children (three or more were officially encouraged by the government for women of your background, and at least two should be boys). (Kwan, 2013:62)

This phenomenon applies to one of the characters in the second novel of the trilogy, Colette Bing, who is the heiress of the Bing Family. She said, "...I thought that they were priming me to succeed in business, but it turns out all they want is for me to get married and start giving them grandsons" (Kwan, 2015:375).

Due to their obligation to only marry the rich and reproduce, some of the women characters do not have their own identities. They are identified by whom they marry, hence, the womens' identities are beneath the mens'. One such example is how Eleanor is perceived as more powerful since she married a wealthier man, "the place of honor on Carol's Qing dynasty Huanghuali bed was always reserved for Eleanor, for even though this was Carol's house and she was the one married to the billionaire financier, Carol still deferred to her" (Kwan, 2013:24). Another example, "...Daisy (married to the rubber magnate Q. T. Foo but born a Wong, of the Ipoh Wongs) fought to separate the starchy noodles while trying to find 1 Timothy in her King James Bible" (Kwan, 2013:24).

#### **3.1.1.1.1.3. Different Perception**

Not every woman character in the trilogy is a housewife or a full-time mother, some do have a career outside of the house. However, as stated by Darrity Jr, their work is not taken in the same way as the men's. In this case, Nick works as a professor in one of the universities in New York along with Rachel, as shown when Nick said, "Spring break was last month, and we interim-adjunct sub-associate professors don't get any extra vacation days. But Rachel and I have the

whole summer off, which is why I want her to come home with me” (Kwan, 2013:36). The only difference is how people perceive their occupations. Nick does not receive any negative view regarding his preference of career as a professor, meanwhile Rachel receives a less rewarding view from the other characters. The different view is shown by Eleanor’s reaction when she knows that Rachel, similar to her son, is a professor:

Yes, definitely. I’m told she’s one of the up-and-coming professors in her field. Eleanor was nonplussed. A professor! Nicky was dating a professor! Oh my, was this woman older than him? “Nicky didn’t tell me what her specialty was.” “Oh, economic development.” A cunning, calculating older woman. Alamak. This was sounding worse and worse. (Kwan, 2013:53)

However, although Nick is also a professor, Eleanor has never said anything condescending about his profession. In fact, nobody in the trilogy has ever said so. Therefore, it clearly shows that even though men and women have the same occupations, women can be perceived as ‘less’, nevertheless.

### **3.2.1.2. Home Sphere**

In terms of the depiction of gender inequality in the home sphere, this is depicted through gendered division of household labor, unequal power in the household, and domestic violence.

#### **3.2.1.2.1. Gendered Division of Household Labor**

Gender inequality occurs in both the public sphere and in domestic sphere. One of the most common gender inequalities in the domestic sphere occurs in terms of the gendered division of household labor. Women tend to do all the housework

and all of their activities are home-centered in accordance with their nature, whilst men do not feel the need, and are not expected to engage in any housework simply because they work outside the home is perceived as being more valuable since it directly generates money to finance the family. Throughout all the novels of the trilogy, married women characters are mostly the ones taking care of the household, while their husbands are work outside of the family home.

Take Astrid and Michael for instance. Michael is a businessman in a tech world who is trying hard to get his company off the ground. Hence, he is rarely home, let alone taking care of the household and his little son. On the other hand, Astrid is a philanthropist, a member of many reputable art-galleries, and a fashion enthusiast. She attends a lot of charity events, joins several high-value art auctions along with the other affluent people from around the world, and attends many fittings for her couture at least twice a year. Busy is an understatement when it comes to describing her schedule. However, since she is a woman, she is the one who takes more care of the household and the child. As written in the first novel of the trilogy:

Cassian was just being buttoned into his smart new Prussian-blue sailor suit when Astrid got a call from her husband. “I have to work late and won’t make it in time for dinner at Ah Ma’s.” “Really? Michael, you’ve worked late every single night this week,” Astrid said. (Kwan, 2013:61)

This shows that woman in the role of a wife is more responsible to perform the housework and spend more time nursing the child, as if it is natural for them, despite anything. Meanwhile, as a husband, the male character is not expected to do

anything related to the household and upbringing of his child other than supporting his family financially. Therefore, gender inequality in terms of labor division of household, is proven to exist in the trilogy.

#### **3.2.1.2.2. Unequal Power**

Putting a man as the head of the family, and woman in the second position, is ingrained as a marriage principle, which results in men holding most authority over the rest of the family members. Such a condition is portrayed in the trilogy. The first portrayal occurs in the second novel where Jack Bing, as the father of Colette Bing, gives his blessing to Richie Yang to marry his daughter. Knowing that, Colette said to her father that she does not want to marry Richie because she is not interested at all. However, instead of listening to what his daughter said, Jack Bing as the head of the family and who takes control over the domestic sphere, does not take Colette's statement into account, "Jack laughed, and then he said in a low whisper, "Silly girl, I never asked if you were interested in marrying him. Your interest is not my concern." Then he turned and headed back upstairs" (Kwan, 2015:211).

Another example comes from Michael, who in this case is a son-in-law. Michael feels that he is treated badly by his father-in-law who is rather a snob. When Michael expresses his feelings to Astrid regarding her father's behavior towards him, Astrid makes a rather bold statement, "my father looks down on everyone. Even his own children. That's just the way he is" (Kwan, 2015:369). As

the head of the Leong family, Harry Leong has a freedom to look down on just about everyone, including his very own family members. This shows how powerful his position is, even to the point where Astrid, as his daughter, views it as something rather normal by saying ‘that is just the way it is’.

The privilege of men being the head of the family and holding the strongest power in terms of authority, results in women being placed in a weak, or at least weaker, place in the family hierarchy. This is shown in Colette’s case where she cannot decide her love-life, and Astrid’s case in which she cannot defend her own husband being abused by her father because “Fathers (head of family) are just way too powerful”. Therefore, the depiction of gender inequality in terms of unequal power is proven to exist, which, more often than not, can be the cause of domestic violence.

#### **3.2.1.2.3. Domestic Violence**

Men’s placing as the one who holds the highest position in the household, can lead them to express their authority towards women through domestic violence. In this trilogy, the domestic violence is present in various ways, however, emotional abuse which creates an impact psychologically, is prominent.

The first term mentioned in the theoretical framework regarding emotional abuse is isolation, which is suffered by Gisele, the daughter of Kitty and Bernard, and Kitty herself, “Oh my goodness—is that cute little girl your daughter?” Corinna

asked. “Yes, that’s Gisele. Here, put on some of this organic hand sanitizer before you meet her” said Kitty” (Kwan, 2015:348). As the head of the family, Bernard insists Gisele follow his new rule of living, which includes being super clean (hence the hand sanitizer is mentioned), avoiding plastics, and joining several classes such as foreign language learning, coding, yoga, and a carnial-sacral session at such a young age. The decision to start a new way of life which impacts the upbringing of Gisele is only affected with Bernard’s approval as the husband, meanwhile Kitty as a wife, is not given any chance to have a say in it:

I have no say in any of this, because apparently I’m too stupid to understand anything. You know, I actually think Bernard prefers it when I’m in Asia. I think he’s afraid I will somehow make this child more stupid. He doesn’t even care if I exist anymore. (Kwan, 2015:352)

This just goes to show how little a women’s role can be valued, compared to men’s, in terms of decision making in the household. Not only can the previous quotation be considered as an act of humiliation and degradation, which is another type of emotional abuse, it ends up costing Kitty through isolation in the household as the new way of living continues. In page 352 of the second novel, *China Rich Girlfriend*, Kitty tells Corinna the story of how it all started, in which she explicitly admits that she feels totally isolated:

The first year after Gisele was born was the worst. Bernard moved us to Los Angeles when Gisele was just two months old—claiming that Singapore was toxic for her, that his parents were toxic for her. Here, I was totally isolated, with Bernard hovering over us every second of the day, policing every single thing I did. (Kwan, 2015:352)

Emotional abuse also occurs in Astrid and Michael's marriage. The sickening feeling that Michael develops over the years caused by the humiliation and degradation displayed by Astrid's family drives him to become a monster; someone that is abusive to his own family. On many occasions, Michael threatens physical abuse which is another type of emotional abuse as explained in the theoretical framework. One such occasion is when Michael yells at the maid, "Ludivine, don't you dare fucking move or I'll motherfucking break your neck!" Michael shouted. The au pair froze, and Cassian stared at his father wide-eyed" (Kwan, 2015:370). Aside from setting a bad example to his young son by cursing as well as shouting to the maid, Michael also threatens the maid with physical abuse. On the other side, Astrid cannot do anything about it except beg Michael to stop and trying to escape from the house with her little son, Cassian. However, seeing Astrid's attempt to escape, Michael threatens more physical abuse, "Michael ran to the front door and blocked it. He grabbed a fifteenth-century Bavarian poleax from the wall and waved it threateningly at Astrid" (Kwan, 2015:370).

The last married couple to experience domestic violence is Eddie and Fiona. Eddie is an entitled man who fortunately comes from one of the Singapore's super-wealthy families. Eddie is obsessive in his desire to be the center of attention, hence, his name and pictures are more than often printed as the covers of top magazines. Due to his popularity, it is rather hard to keep his affairs to himself, as stated by some gossipers, "he had made Hong Kong Tatler's "Most Invited" list four years

in a row, and befitting a man of his status, he had already gone through three mistresses since marrying Fiona thirteen years ago” (Kwan, 2013:69). The fact that Eddie’s love affair becomes public humiliates no one more than Fiona, his wife, “think of what Fiona Tung has to go through with Eddie. The humiliation” (Kwan, 2013:103). However, Eddie does not seem to care and keeps doing whatever he wants. On the other hand, Fiona, who also comes from an affluent family, is a very patient woman. In fact, patient is an understatement. Since being married to Eddie, Fiona is always criticized about almost everything that she does, especially when it comes to grooming herself to look picture-perfect in photo sessions for the magazines that Eddie insists to be the cover on. Eddie’s obsession to always look and be perceived as perfect drives him to become abusive to his family, and not only to his wife, but also to his children. At some point, Eddie says, “I don’t remember seeing a picture of this dress. I never would have approved it. You look like some spinster widow” (Kwan, 2013:199) to Fiona when she wears something that is way too basic in his eyes. His obsession to always appear perfect also results in him making a threat of physical harm towards one of his children who accidentally stains his expensive shirt:

Don’t be stupid! I’ve already worn both of those the past two nights. I had everything perfectly planned until this little bastard came along! Stop hiding, you little bastard! Be a man and accept your punishment! Eddie broke free from his wife and lunged toward the boy with his right arm outstretched. (Kwan, 2013:298)

The threat of physical harm later turns into a physical abuse, evidenced when Fiona tries to defend her child by saying, “you really care so much about them

that you'd rather hit your own son over an accident that you caused in the first place?" (Kwan, 2013:298). However, as a wife, Fiona cannot do anything more than a mere protest to protect herself and her children. The power imbalance in the household results in Eddie being able to get away with anything; letting his obsession hurt his own family, while also making Fiona feel anything but appreciated, let alone respected.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

The *Crazy Rich Asians* trilogy tells a story about the lives of super-wealthy Asian people and families. Although the main idea of the trilogy is not about gender inequality, the trilogy still depicts, both explicitly and implicitly, actions of gender inequality through the characters. By using gender inequality theory, the writer analyses the gender inequality practice in the trilogy that occurs in both the public sphere and the home sphere.

Gender inequality, in the context of the public sphere, is depicted in the labor force. It is exemplified by most of the women characters not having the same chance to pursue a reputable career, even though most of them attend the same, or at least equally prestigious educational institutions as the men characters. This happens to Corinna Tung in comparison to Edison Cheng, where both are equally educated, motivated and resourceful, yet Corrina's job is nowhere near as prestigious as Eddie's. On top of that, most of the women characters are also expected to be housewife, despite the equality of their backgrounds. Although not all the women characters are housewives, those who have a career do not receive the same appreciation as men. This applies to Nick's and Rachel's situation where they have the same occupations, as professors, yet they are not treated in the same way.

Gender inequality in the home sphere is depicted through the labor division of the household that places women in a position where they must be the ones taking part more in the household labor than the men, which applies in the marriage between Astrid Leong and Michael Teo. Women also do not have an equal amount of power at home. In addition to that, the home sphere gender inequality is also depicted through domestic violence which is suffered by at least three women characters of the trilogy, Kitty Pong, Astrid Leong, and Fiona Tung.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Biography of Kevin Kwan

Kevin Kwan is a Singaporean-American author who was born in Singapore in 1973. As a novelist, Kevin Kwan started to gain his fame for his work that focused on portraying the extra-ordinary life of the Asian upper-class society, mainly covering Singapore, China, and Hong Kong. Quoted from *Town & Country*, and written by Marshall Heyman in June 2020, it is revealed that Kwan comes from an affluent family background.

The Kwan clan is full of individuals with remarkable lives: his paternal grandfather was an ophthalmologist knighted by Queen Elizabeth II; his great-grandfather was a founding director of the Oversea-Chinese Banking Corporation; his maternal grandfather founded a Methodist church; his great uncle helped invent Tiger Balm; his cousin, Nancy Kwan, is a famous Hollywood actress (2020)

Kwan was inspired by his very own childhood experiences of his having a fortunate upbringing in Singapore, to create and write the *Crazy Rich Asians* trilogy. Based on an interview with National Public Radio, it is revealed that he lived in Singapore until he was 11, and then moved to America and has been living as an American for more than 30 years.

HONG: Do you feel like you are as American as you are Chinese?

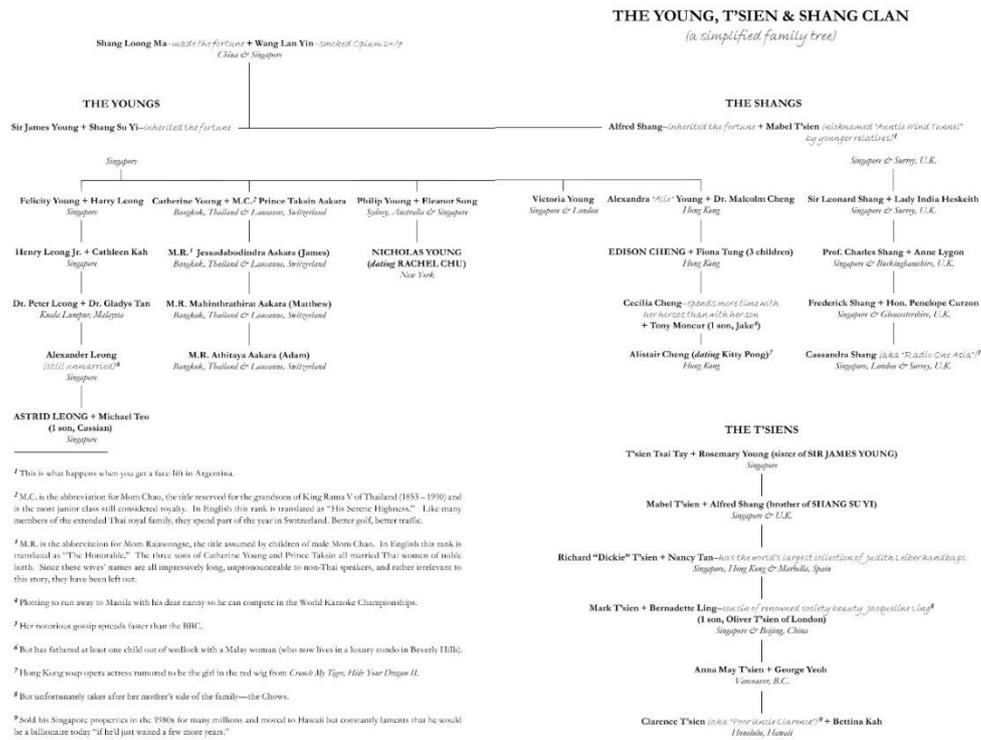
KWAN: I do, actually. I mean, I've been I've been here since I was 11...

HONG: Yeah.

KWAN: ...So that's, you know, more than 30 years now. In fact, my Chinese relatives would say that I'm much more American than I am Chinese.

Kwan earned two degrees, a Bachelor of Arts for Media Studies from University of Houston-Clear Lake and Bachelor of Fine Arts for Photography from Parsons School of Design, New York. Despite living on the other side of the world from Singapore and America, Hong Kong Tatler stated in March 2020 that Kwan is an astute observer of the evolution of Asian society, especially in modern times.

## Appendix B: Crazy Rich Asians Trilogy's Family Tree



**Appendix C: Synopsis of *Crazy Rich Asians***

In short, the novel tells a story of a man who comes from an incredibly wealthy and powerful background who falls in love with a woman whose origins are not approved of by his family.

The story begins with portrayal of a relationship between Rachel Chu as an economics professor and Nicholas Young, who goes by the name Nick. Unlike Rachel who comes from an ordinary Chinese immigrant family background in New York, Nick turns out to be the heir to one of the wealthiest family fortunes in Singapore. However, Nick doesn't reveal his family background to Rachel even though the two of them have been dating for two years. Both Nick and Rachel have been living a simple life as young academics in New York city, America.

The story starts to get interesting when for the first time Nick asks Rachel to go to Singapore with him to attend the wedding of his best friend, Colin Khoo. At first, Rachel was hesitant, for Singapore is located almost literally on the other side of the world but she eventually agrees to fly immediately after Nick mentioned Peik Lin's name, Rachel's close friend, who she met during her university days, and who lives in Singapore.

Nick does not know how to confront his girlfriend about the reality of his family's condition in Singapore. He receives advice from Astrid, his dear cousin, to gradually prepare Rachel for the shock but he chooses to do nothing about it. While making the decision to just go with the flow, the news of his relationship

with Rachel has been widely spread, reaching Singapore, and making many of the wealthy young women shocked and displeased. Nick is expected to marry a woman from the same background. This expectation is also prevalent in his family, especially his mother and his grandmother.

The story then switches its focus to Astrid, whose there is conjecture that her husband, Michael, is having an affair. Michael admits that he is having an affair with a woman in Hong Kong. However, Astrid insists on staying married to Michael despite the scandal. Later, she finds out that Michael is not having an affair, yet he deliberately acts as if he is, to get away from Astrid. This is because Michael, who comes from an ordinary background, has been unhappy for years. In his life with Astrid, he is regularly exposed to Astrid's family who treat him poorly. The reason is because Michael, as a man, is expected to be wealthier than Astrid. It raises the concern regarding gender inequality where men are expected to have more income and ability to financially provide for their household, whereas women are not required to meet such expectation.

No, you just don't see it! But I can't face another dinner at Nassim Road or Tyersall Park with some minister of finance, some genius artist I don't get, or some tycoon who has a whole bloody museum named after him, feeling like I'm just a piece of meat. To them, I'm always 'Astrid's husband.' And those people—your family, your friends—they stare at me with such judgment. They're all thinking, 'Aiyah, she could have married a prince, a president—why did she marry this Ah Beng\* from Toa Payoh?' (2013:352)

The moment Rachel arrives in Singapore, she is overwhelmed by the reality that her and her boyfriend have to face. Nick's family and friends, especially his

mom, Eleanor, does everything she can to upset and humiliate Rachel. During the bachelorette party, Rachel is subjected to severe bullying which Nick is not aware of until she eventually tells him. Nick is shocked. However, Nick persuades Rachel to take a road trip with him to the summer home owned by his grandmother, Su Yi, the most powerful person in the household and plans to propose to Rachel there. As it turns out, Eleanor and Su Yi have been waiting for them there. Eleanor makes an unexpectedly controversial announcement that Rachel's father is not dead but is in jail somewhere in mainland China. This leads to Eleanor and Su Yi forbidding Nick to marry Rachel using disinheritance as a threat.

After facing the chaotic event in the summer home, Rachel takes an unprecedented step by asking Nick to leave her alone for some time. Nick then hides at Colin's place, meanwhile Rachel stays with Peik Lin, her friend. Knowing his best friend is not in the best condition, Colin then returns early from his honeymoon to tell Nick to go after Rachel. Meanwhile, Rachel and Peik Lin arrange to go to China to visit Rachel's father. As they are ready to set off for China, Nick comes to them along with Rachel's mother, Kerry, and stop them for going. Kerry begs Rachel not to go, she then explains the truth about Rachel's father. Kerry was married to an abusive drunk and was saved by a man who became Rachel's real father. This means Rachel is a product of an affair. Knowing that it would put both Rachel and her in danger, Kerry leaves China for good and goes to America. After

knowing the truth, Rachel pities her mother which leads to a reconciliation between them. Rachel eventually grants Nick a second chance.

#### **Appendix D: Synopsis of China Rich Girlfriend**

In short, the novel is a portrayal of wealth and privilege that some fortunate Asians have. The story involves Astrid who tries her best to stay married to her husband who turns into a completely different person due to the impact of his increasing wealth. Meanwhile, Rachel and Nick start to get to know the Baos, a family to whom Rachel is inevitably related. At last, Kitty Tai's realization about her reputation among the privileged society is not as important as her being true to herself.

The story begins with a newspaper article concerning a serious car accident in London. Carlton Bao is the person behind the Ferrari wheel, along with two other girls who are seriously injured. One of them dies. Being aware of the situation, Shaoyen Bao, Carlton's mother, flies to London with her private banker immediately to pay some money to ensure the truth about the dead girl will never be discovered by the public. During the trip, Shaoyen by chance gets to meet Eleanor, which leads them to get along together. Eleanor immediately hires a private investigator after she sees a picture of Carlton because Carlton looks very similar to Rachel. She finds out later that Rachel Chu, the girl whom her son is engaged to, is the daughter of a wealthy Chinese politician.

Eleanor breaks the news regarding Rachel's real father to Nick on his wedding day with Rachel. After their wedding, they immediately meet Bao, Rachel's real father. They then decide to visit China in order to get to know Rachel's family. Shaoyen does not want to meet Rachel, as she feels that the presence of Rachel in her family will affect her Nick's career badly. This leads to Rachel and Nick being able to spend a quality time with Carlton, Rachel's stepbrother, and Colette, Carlton's close friend. However, the harmony between them does not last for long. At one point, Colette learns that Carlton's father is thinking of removing Carlton from his will in favor of Rachel. Colette becomes terribly upset; she then asks her personal assistant to poison Rachel hoping Rachel would stay away from China. Once Rachel discovers the poisoning incident, Colette does not want to admit her role in the poisoning scheme and blames everything on her personal assistant (PA), and instead, she asks Rachel to forgive her PA. However, Colette and Rachel get into a fight not long after that. Colette loses control and starts to scream at Rachel for not helping her to reconcile with Carlton. After that, Rachel does not want to meet Colette ever again.

On the other side, Astrid tries her best to cover up her frustration over Michael. Michael becomes very critical of Astrid, and he likes to blame her for everything since he gained his wealth. This just goes to show how powerful men can be once they have sufficient wealth, leaving women to become oppressed and powerless in the household. The truth is, Charlie Wu, Astrid's ex fiancée, bought

most of the shares in Michael's company in hope that Michael will overcome his insecurity issue and the marriage can be saved to make Astrid happy.

Those goddamn earrings again! You lost me the biggest deal because of those earrings!" Michael scoffed. "What on earth are you talking about?" Astrid asked, peering out from her hiding place. "The deal fell through today. They weren't anywhere near my asking price." "I'm so sorry, hon." Astrid emerged from underneath the desk and tried to give him a hug, but he pulled away after a second. As Michael began changing out of his work clothes, he continued: "We really screwed up that client dinner. I don't blame you, I blame me. I was the fool who asked you to change. Apparently, your look didn't go over so well with everyone (2015:241)

The novel then tells a story of Kitty Pong, also known as Katherine Tai. She is approached by a consultant, Corinna Ko-Tung, to help her with her society-climbing agenda. However, Kitty eventually senses that Corinna makes her feel that she cannot be herself. At some point, Kitty invites Corinna to visit her husband, Bernard, whose life has changed drastically. The drastic change pushes Corinna to suggest to Kitty to take Gisele, her daughter, away from Bernard. Kitty eventually kidnaps her own daughter despite the possibility of losing her credibility which she needs to climb the social hierarchy.

### **Appendix E: Synopsis of Rich People's Problems**

In short, the novel tells a story about family members speculating over who will inherit Tyersall Park. The story involves Astrid's scandal that damages her and the whole family's reputation and Kitty Bing's struggle to compete with Colette as her stepdaughter.

The story begins with the well-spread news about Su Yi's condition. She is reported to suffer from a major heart attack, which also reveals that she may not have a long time to live. This leads to a large number of people, from family to close friends, visiting her home. During this sad situation, Eddie Chang, one of Su Yi's grandsons, tries to take charge of the situation hoping that he can somehow make his grandmother leave the estate to him upon her passing. Eddie deliberately twists his grandmother's words which results in Nick, his grandmother's favorite grandson, not being able to enter the estate.

Despite the situation, Astrid manages to sneak out to India to meet Charlie. At that moment, Charlie proposes to Astrid although Astrid is still married to Michael, as her divorce process has not been finalized. Paparazzi, whom Astrid and Charlie believe is paid by Michael, take photos of the proposal. This shocks the whole family, except Su Yi. As it turns out, before Charlie proposes, he asked for Su Yi's blessing first.

One of the guards who has been loyally working for Su Yi for a long period of time overheard Eddie's, and his mother, Alix's, argument in which Eddie declares that Su Yi did not precisely tell him about not wanting to meet Nick. This leads to Nick and Astrid sneaking their way into the estate. After meeting with Astrid and Nick, Su Yi's condition gets better. However, she dies later that day.

After Su Yi's death, the family members gather in an office to listen to the reading of the will hoping they will inherit an adequate amount of money. The will

unveils that Su Yi's children, and two grandsons own a certain percentage of ownership of the estate. However, the males receive more than the females. This just goes to show the existence of gender inequality.

My only son, PHILIP YOUNG: 30 percent

My eldest daughter, FELICITY YOUNG: 12.5 percent

My second daughter, CATHERINE YOUNG AAKARA: 12.5 percent

My third daughter, VICTORIA YOUNG: 12.5 percent

My youngest daughter, ALEXANDRA YOUNG CHENG: 12.5 percent  
(2017:287)

Since Nick's father does not want to deal with the estate, he gives all his ownership to Nick which results in Nick having the biggest portion of ownership of Tyresall Park. As the biggest shareholder, Nick insists that the estate to be added to the national historic registry. However, he needs three billion dollars to achieve his goal. Surprisingly, Kitty is willing to be a secret investor after knowing that her husband plans to buy the estate for Colette as a wedding gift.