

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 164, No. 171

Serving Chicago's legal community for 163 years

An American fairy tale, exported to Singapore

Americans love a Cinderella story, almost as much as they love the indomitable American spirit.

“Crazy Rich Asians,” directed by Jon M. Chu and adapted from the 2013 best-selling novel by Kevin Kwan, delivers both.

What more could one ask from a frothy, formulaic, end-of-summer fairytale of star-crossed lovers?

Blinding sequins? Over-the-top consumption? Dizzying exotic locations? Done.

Pleasant, plucky and predictable, careful to conform to romantic comedy conventions, “Crazy Rich Asians” replicates the successful happily-ever-after cinematic confections that precede it — Gary Marshall (“Pretty Woman”) and Nancy Meyers (“It’s Complicated”) wrapped in Jane Austen.

This time, the star-crossed lovers — and everyone else in the movie — are (East) Asian.

Not a big deal. As Singapore-based critic Kirsten Han points out, in countries that do not share the America’s uniquely racial lens, “Crazy Rich Asians” is not considered a “miracle of inclusion.”

Yet Chu had to fight to cast an Asian-American actress (Constance Wu, “Fresh Off the Boat”) in the starring role.

American-raised Rachel Chu, played by Wu, is the youngest economics professor at New York University. She is confronted with conflicts of class and culture as she squares off with the family of her boyfriend, Nick Young (Henry Golding), the most eligible bachelor in Singapore, when she flies



**REBECCA
L. FORD**

Rebecca L. Ford is counsel to Scharf Banks Marmor LLC, and concentrates her practice on complex litigation, compliance, board governance and specialized employment issues. She is the former executive vice president for litigation and intellectual property at MGM. She can be reached at rford@scharfbanks.com.

home with him for a wedding.

“You will always be an American,” Nick’s imperious mother, Eleanor (Michelle Yeoh, “Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon”), declares before turning a cold shoulder.

Rachel has been raised to be independent and to follow her passions. Eleanor sacrificed everything — her law career and other ambitions — in deference to her husband’s mega-rich family.

Eleanor identifies with Rachel well enough to conclude that Rachel isn’t worthy of her son.

But Rachel is from the land of plucky heroines. It will take more than Nick’s tiger mom to deter her. After all, she teaches game theory for a living.

Rachel’s motto: “The key is playing to win, instead of trying not to lose.”

The movie’s campy buoyancy is kept afloat by the brilliant casting of a who’s who of popular U.S.-

based comedians in key supporting roles: Awkwafina (“Ocean’s 8”) as Rachel’s best friend, Peik Lin, whose wacky dad is played by Ken Jeong (“Community”); and Nico Santos (“Superstore”), Ronny Chieng (“The Daily Show”) and Jimmy O. Yang (“Silicon Valley”) as Nick’s over-the-top relatives.

Cast as leading man, “Crazy Rich Asians” is Golding’s first movie. Selected for his suave beauty and impeccable British accent, Golding’s immediate prior gig was as a television travel show host.

It seems right that Golding, and therefore Nick, are essentially blank slates upon which audiences and the movie’s fictional Singaporeans can project their princely fantasies.

Watching this handsome cipher move from room to room in which he is the most desired object conjures flashbacks to Stephen Sondheim’s grim Grimm sequel “Into the Woods” in which the post-slipper prince explains to an inevitably disappointed Cinderella, “I was raised to be charming, not sincere.”

As a cultural event, it matters that “Crazy Rich Asians” is entirely Asian. But as Americans, we already know this story well. It is both universal and quintessentially our own.

In June, we breathlessly watched a horse-drawn carriage whisk Prince Harry and his American princess bride away to a castle. And when the Meghan Markle movie is released, it will have the same plot as “Crazy Rich Asians.”