

CONFLICT IN KEVIN KWAN'S NOVEL *CRAZY RICH ASIANS*

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Abstract

The study aims to describe the kinds of conflict and also the factors causing conflict in Kevin Kwan's novel *Crazy Rich Asians*. It only focuses on kinds of conflict and factors causing conflict in selected characters of the novel. This study used a qualitative method. The data were analyzed descriptively. The data in this study were collected from the novel *Crazy Rich Asians* by Kevin Kwan. The data were taken by reading and marking words and phrases from the novel, which are related to the study. The data were analyzed from the novel based on the theory and statement of the problem to be analyzed. The results of the analysis obtained from this study have two conclusions. First, the types of conflicts in the novel *Crazy Rich Asians*, namely internal and external conflict are found in several characters in the novel. Second, the factors that may cause conflict in the novel *Crazy Rich Asians* are causative factors. These factors are differences between individuals, cultural differences, and differences in interests. The results of this study are expected to provide benefits, understanding, and knowledge in analyzing conflict in a literary work in the form of a novel. The results of this study are also expected to be used as a reference for further research.

Keywords: *causative factors; conflict; external conflict; internal conflict*

1. Introduction

The world of literature does not only talk about beauty, but also the meaning of life, love, and affection. Literary work contains critical ideas aimed at the government and social realities that are deemed incompatible with the hopes and interests of the community (Manugeran, et al, 2020). Novels and literary works were used to express criticism (Nasution, et al, 2023). Literary works always intersect with the people in the era where the literary work was created, as well as the novel *Crazy Rich Asians* written by Kevin Kwan. The novel was released in 2013, even though the conflict in this novel has been going on for a long time, it is not much different from nowadays where love is not approved by parents because of differences in family background. This problem is actually a cliché problem that often appears in love stories involving rich people, who as heirs must focus on the family business and marry someone who is considered to be equal in wealth. The conflicts in the novel *Crazy Rich Asians* are disputes and bickering over various problems in the novel, such as differences in family and cultural

backgrounds, struggles, and so on. This novel tells the life of wealthy Chinese-Singaporeans.

Conflict often occurs in society and it is sometimes unavoidable because individuals have different opinions, desires, and even needs. It is very possible that there are individuals who do not accept these differences and a conflict may occur. According to Soekanto in (Laning, 2009: 30), conflict is a situation in which individuals or groups try to achieve their goals by challenging the opposing party using threats or violence to achieve goals. Furthermore, Lawang (1994) states that conflict is a struggle to gain value, status, power and so on. It aims not only to achieve victory, but also to subdue its competitors (opponents).

In the novel *Crazy Rich Asians*, there are two conflicts, namely internal conflicts and external conflicts. Internal conflict is a conflict that occurs in the heart and soul of a character in the story. This conflict is experienced by a character in the story who has internal problems with opposing desires or beliefs, and it drives their development as characters. External conflict is a conflict that occurs between a character and something or someone outside the character, it could be another character in the story, the natural environment and so on. The existence of external conflict can create tension when a character tries to achieve goals in the story. Regarding this, the writers raise the statement of the problem in kinds of conflict and some its causative factors.

2. Literature Review

Novels as a reflection of society illustrate the reality of the community in terms of social, economic and cultural activities that are developed in the community because literature is inseparable from the real life of society (Pardi, et al, 2020). Nurgiyantoro (2002:122) states that conflict is an event that is classified as important in the development of the plot. The development of the plot of a narrative work will be influenced not to say and is determined by the form and content of the conflict, the structure of the conflict that is displayed. The author's ability to choose and build conflict through various events (both actions and incidents) will greatly determine the level of interest, suspense, and story that is produced.

Nasution, et al. (2020) state that conflict can be defined as a clash between individuals arising of a difference in thought process, attitudes, understanding, interests, requirement and even sometimes perceptions. A conflict results incompatibility in heated arguments, physical abuses and definitely loss of peace.

2.1 Internal and External Conflict

According to Stanton (1965:16), there are two categories of conflict: internal and external conflict. Internal conflict is a conflict that occurs in the heart or soul of a character. This conflict is a conflict experienced by humans with themselves, which is more an internal problem of a human being. According to Nugiyantoro (2010: 124), it is a conflict that occurs in the heart, soul of a character (or characters) in a story. Internal conflict is a conflict experienced by oneself.

Davidoff (1991: 178) names internal conflict as psychological conflict. It is a conflict that occurs in the heart, soul of a character or characters in a story. So it is a conflict that humans experience with themselves, causing feelings of sadness, disappointment, indecision, that is in the inner feeling of a human being.

External conflict is a conflict that occurs between a character and something or someone outside the character. It could be another character in the story, the natural

environment and so on (Nurgiyantoro, 2002: 124). The existence of external conflict may create tension when a character tries to achieve goals in the story.

2.2 Some Factors Causing Conflict

According to Soekanto (2013), there are several factors causing conflict. They are as follows:

2.2.1 Differences between Individuals

Differences in stances and beliefs of individuals that cause conflict between individuals. In this case each party tries to destroy the opponent both physically and thoughts and ideas that do not agree with it. So, the differences that occur in social interaction are often the cause of conflict, because the stances and feelings of an individual are not always in line with the stances and feelings of other individuals or groups. For example, when there is a music performance in the community, of course, the feelings and responses of each member of the community are different. There are those who feel annoyed because it is noisy, but on the other hand there are those who feel entertained.

2.2.2 Cultural Differences

A culture that is attached to a person is capable of causing conflict when these cultures collide with other cultures. Personality differences between individuals also depend on the cultural patterns that form the background for the formation and development of that personality. A person, consciously or unconsciously, will be more or less influenced by the thoughts and stances of his group. An individual born and raised in a rural area will have an independent personality, have a social spirit, respect for others, tolerance, and so on. However, it will be different from the personality possessed by an individual who grows and develops in urban areas, they tend to be individualistic, indifferent, competitive, and so on. These differences are due to differences in the values and norms of each cultural group that are adapted to the needs of its members or society. This difference relates to the size in determining what is good or bad, noble or not noble, inappropriate, polite or impolite, between one cultural group or society that differs from another cultural group or society. This is adapted to the pattern of thinking that is motivated by the culture of each group or society, so that harmony between groups in society with all cultural differences is difficult to achieve, and often creates clashes that lead to conflict. Each of these cultural groups has a tendency to maintain its own group ego. They are more concerned with the interests of their group and consider other groups as enemies.

2.2.3 Difference in Interest

Humans as social beings are always inseparable from society. As individuals, humans have distinctive roles in their environment as well as unique personalities and patterns of behavior. Every person and every social group has different interests. Generally interests refer to the desire or need for something. A person is able to do anything to get their interests in order to achieve a prosperous life. The difference in interests makes them compete with each other for the opportunities, facilities and resources needed, thus causing a conflict.

3. Research Method

A qualitative research method is used for processing and compiling data. The writers analyze this novel with explanation and description. The qualitative research is a scientific observation method for collecting non-numeric data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). This type of research refers to meaning, definition of concepts, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of something and not to count or measure. The writers describe the data in the form of words and sentences about the topic of problems in the novel *Crazy Rich Asians*.

4. Discussion

4.1 Kinds of Conflict

4.1.1 Internal Conflict

Internal conflict is faced by Rachel Chu who is the main character in *Crazy Rich Asians*. Rachel is a woman of Chinese descent and an immigrant who grows up and settles in America. She has been raised solely by her mother. Rachel is an economics lecturer in New York University. One day, she is invited by his Chinese-Singaporean boyfriend, Nicholas Young (Nick), for a summer vacation. He invites Rachel to attend his best friend's wedding, Colin Khoo, in Singapore. At first, Rachel has been hesitant and finally she has been excited to go to Singapore. But when she gets there, she faces various conflicts that are contrary to her expectations.

Yet something about this trip made Rachel a little apprehensive, and she couldn't help but ponder the deeper implications. Nick made it seem so spontaneous, but knowing him, she was sure he had put far more thought into it than he let on. They had been together for almost two years, and now he was inviting her on an extended trip to visit his hometown, to attend his best friend's wedding, no less. Did this mean what she thought it did? (Kwan, 2013:27)

The trip to Singapore makes Rachel a little apprehensive about what has happened next if she goes with Nick to Singapore. They have been in a relationship for almost two years, and Rachel feels that she knows Nick's personality well enough as a well-prepared person. Nick makes her the offer. It seems spontaneously making Rachel wonder what her boyfriend's plans are. She has convinced that Nick is thinking about it much more which Nick shows her. She is curious about Nick's intention to take her to his hometown and to introduce her to his family.

After being arrived in Singapore, Rachel experiences internal conflict the next morning after she attends a *wijayakusuma* party at Nick's grandmother's residence, Tyersall Park. In the party, Rachel has been magical, but Rachel still feels uneasy about the rich life of Nick's family. Rachel thinks that Nick seemed to have and lead a double life.

Last night had been magical, and yet she couldn't help but feel burgeoning sense of unease. It was as if she had stumbled into a secret chamber and discovered that her boyfriend had been living a double life. 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, 2013:196)

The ordinary life they both lead together in New York has no resemblance with the wealthy life Nick has in Singapore. Rachel is no layman in the world of wealth. Rachel's impoverished childhood is replaced by her teenage years growing up in the Bay Area which is one of the wealthiest cities in America. Rachel attends two of the nation's top universities: Stanford and Northwestern, where she meets and befriends another type of rich kid. Rachel also now lives in America's most expensive city, where she mingles with the academic elite.

4.1.2 External Conflict

Rachel Chu has an external conflict with her boyfriend, Nick Young, after she gets bad treatment from Nick's ex and his friends who try to break her down. The stress that Rachel has endured since she arrives in Singapore. What Francesca and Mandy has done made her unable to hold it in any longer, and she wants to leave Nick's grandmother's house.

“I don't deny it, but—”

“You asshole!”

Nick threw his hands up in despair. “I'm thirty-two, and as far as I know I've never mentioned joining the priesthood. I *do* have sexual history, but I've never tried to conceal any of it from you.”

“It's not that you concealed it. It's more that you never told me in the first place! You should have said something. You should told me that Francesca and you had a past, so I didn't have to sit there tonight and get totally blindsided. I felt like a total fucking idiot.”

Nick sat down on the edge of the chaise lounge, burying his face in his hands. Rachel had every right to be angry—it just never occurred to him to mention something that happened half a lifetime ago. “I'm so sorry—” he began.

“A threesome? With Mandy and *Francesca*? *Really*? Of all the women in the world,” Rachel said contemptuously as she struggled with the zipper on her suitcase. (Kwan, 2013: 383)

From the quotation above, there is an external conflict between Rachel and Nick. Rachel feels disappointed and angry at Nick for not telling her anything about his past relationships with his ex and friend, Francesca and Mandy. Nick tries to explain that he does not mean to hide it from Rachel but Rachel is still angry because Nick has not tell her first. If Nick has told her first, Rachel will not have felt like an idiot sitting at the party listening to sudden attacks from Francesca and Mandy, who are trying to make her jealous.

There is an external conflict between Rachel and her mother, Kerry Ching, after Rachel learns the truth about her father as well as her past self. The external conflict begins when Rachel tries to be brave by calling her mother a few days after arriving at her best friend's house, Peik Lin, to ask directly and to make sure her father is still alive.

Rachel dug her nails into the plush carpeting. “I'm going to ask you one more time: Is. My. Father. Alive?”

“I don't understand. What have you heard?”

“Yes or no, Mom. Don't waste my fucking time!” she spat out.

Kerry gasped at the force of Rachel's anger. It sounded like she was in the next room. "Daughter, you need to calm down."

"Who is Zhou Fang Min?" There. She had said it.

There was a long pause before her mother said nervously, "Daughter, you need to let me explain."

She could feel her heart pounding in her temples. "So it's true. He is alive."

"Yes, but—"

"So everything you've told me my entire life has been a lie! A BIG FUCKING LIE!" Rachel held the phone away from her face and screamed into it, her hands shaking with rage. (Kwan, 2013: 422)

Feeling angry and frustrated, Rachel tries to ask her mother, Kerry Ching, directly about her father. Hearing the force of Rachel's anger, Kerry has shocked and stunned that it sounds like Rachel was in the next room. Kerry is nervous when Rachel asks the name, Zhou Fang Min to make her pause for a moment to answer Rachel's question. Kerry tries to beg to Rachel to listen to her explanation, but Rachel cuts her off because she has thought her father is still alive and her mother has lied to her all her life.

4.2 Some Factors Causing Conflict

4.2.1 Differences between Individual

In *Crazy Rich Asians*, there are differences between the two characters, Astrid Leong and Michael Teo. Astrid, like Nick, comes from a wealthy family. She is referred to as *The Goddess* in Singapore due to her beauty and impeccable fashion sense, being skilled with vintage brands and couture fittings. She is close to her cousin, Nicholas Young. She is one of the few family members who treats his girlfriend, Rachel Chu, kindly. Michael Teo, he is Astrid's husband. Michael is a former Army technology specialist turned businessman and entrepreneur. After his marriage, he struggles to gain acceptance into her family due to his humble background. Although Michael loves his wife, he feels like an outsider in a sea of *crazy rich Asians*, and he struggles to fit in and feel worthy.

"Well, why don't you join us whenever you get off work? It's probably going to be a late night. Ah Ma's tan bua flowers are going to bloom tonight, and she's invited some people over."

"Even more reason for me not to be there. I'm going to be much too worn out."

"Come on, it's going to be a special occasion. You know it's awfully good luck to witness the flowers bloom, and it will be so much fun," Astrid said, struggling to keep the tone light.

"I was there the last time they bloomed three years ago, and I just don't think I can deal with a big crowd tonight."

(Kwan, 2013:155-156)

The quotation above is one of the factors causing conflict due to differences between individuals. The incident is experienced by Astrid and Michael. Astrid tries to persuade her husband, Michael, to attend the Wijayakusuma event held by Nick's grandmother and invited several people. According to Astrid, watching Wijayakusuma

flowers is fun and the myth is that it is good luck to witness the flowers bloom. The Wijayakusuma flower is called *The Queen of Night* because the flower only grows once a year and only blooms at night and withers the next morning. Therefore, the Wijayakusuma event is a special occasion that is not to be missed so Astrid tries hard to convince Michael to join the Wijayakusuma event with him. Unlike Astrid, who enthusiastically wants to attend a special event held by Nick's grandmother, Michael does not like it and is not interested in attending the event. According to him, attending events like that which many people attend makes him bored and tired. Michael felt he could not face many people filled with rich and influential people, so he has insisted on not attending the Wijayakusuma event. Michael has grown up in a humble background and is still looked down upon by Astrid's wealthy family. Therefore, whenever there is an event attended by her family, he tries to refuse to attend even though his wife has tried to convince him to attend with her. He knows how crowded it will be and does not want to be in a sea of rich people because he feels like an outsider and it is hard for him to fit in. The differences between Astrid and Michael can create conflict and can negatively affect their relationship later in the novel.

4.2.2 Cultural Difference

A culture attached to a person can cause conflict when that culture collides with other cultures. Personality differences between individuals also depend on the cultural patterns that form the background for the formation of these personalities. Someone, consciously or unconsciously, will be more or less influenced by the thoughts and stances of the group. The following excerpt below contains cultural differences in which Nick's family thinks response from Singaporean-Chinese towards Rachel as an American-born Chinese.

“Really? What’s her name? And where is she from? Daisy, if you tell me she’s from Mainland China, I think I’ll have a stroke,” Eleanor warned.

“I heard she’s from Taiwan,” Daisy said carefully.

“Oh my goodness, I hope she’s not one of those Taiwanese tornadoes!” Nadine cackled.

“What do you mean by that?” Eleanor asked.

“You know how notorious those Taiwanese girls can be.

They swoop in unexpectedly, the men fall head over heels, and before you know it they are gone, but not before sucking up every last dollar, just like a tornado,” Nadine explained. (Kwan, 2013: 34)

In the novel *Crazy Rich Asians*, there are two types of Chinese, Mainland Chinese, and Overseas Chinese. The Chinese from Mainland China were fugitives who mostly worked as manual laborers and maids during the Qing dynasty. Their knowledge is low and only use the local language and Mandarin. The Chinese from Mainland China have a much lower social status than the Overseas Chinese. Overseas Chinese are people who left China long before the communists arrived and they spread throughout Asia. They secretly has accumulated large amounts of wealth over time and they has controlled trade in Southeast Asian countries including Indonesia. Overseas Chinese are respectable, cultured, intelligent, and successful people. This stereotype has been attached for a long time, so they don't want to be part of Mainland China. They think

their society is better than Mainland China even though they still come from the same country, China.

“Better than *you*? Everyone knows these ABCs are descended from all the peasants that were too stupid to survive in China!” Nadine cackled.

“Hey, Nadine, don’t underestimate them. These ABCs girls can be *tzeen lee bai*,” Lorena Lim warned. “Now that America is broke, all these ABCs want to come to Asia and sink their claws into our men. They are even worse than the Taiwanese tornadoes because they are Westernized, sophisticated, and worst of all, *college educated*.” (Kwan, 2013: 106)

The above quotation shows how Eleanor's close friends show their distaste for ABC girls (American-born Chinese). Rachel is an American-born Chinese who lived and grew up in America. They generalized that Americans born Chinese descended from farmers who were poor and too stupid to survive in China. They think that the ABCs are worse than the Taiwanese girls who have been Westernized and have forgotten their Chinese culture. They think the ABC girls are dangerous and act like all-knowing. Unlike the Nick family, even though they were born and raised in Singapore, they have not forgotten and still maintain their culture from generation to generation. Hearing that Rachel was an ABC from Mainland China made them prejudiced against her because China has long instilled the label of generalizing Americans in a bad light.

4.2.3 Differences in Interests

Differences in interests can lead to conflict. In *Crazy Rich Asians*, there is a difference of interest between Nick's parents, Eleanor Young and Philip Young, regarding their thoughts on Rachel's family background.

“You are not seeing the big picture. This girl is obviously a cunning, deceitful GOLD DIGGER! You know as well as I do that your son can never marry someone like that. Can you imagine how *your* family is going to react when he brings this gold digger home?”

“Actually, I couldn’t care less what they think.”

“But don’t you see how this will affect Nicky? And of course your mother is going to blame me for this, lah. I always get blamed for *everything*. *Alamak*, surely you know how this will end.”

(Kwan, 2013: 104)

From the quotation above, it can be seen the difference in interests between the two characters against Rachel's background. Eleanor told her husband about her concerns about Rachel's background and being from a village in Mainland China. Eleanor calls Rachel a cunning and deceitful gold digger who will only take their son Nick's money. Eleanor is worried about how her husband's family has reacted if they found out Nick has brought a gold digger woman. If her in-laws also finds out, she will blame her and it can ruin her plans to make Nick her favorite grandson and heir. In contrast to Eleanor, Philip seems disinterested in Rachel's background. As long as Eleanor talks about Rachel, Philip only gives her a positive response and tries to calm Eleanor so she will not worry too much about Nick and Rachel's relationship. Philip seems disinterested and at ease against Rachel's background and with her presence in

Singapore. Hearing her husband's calm response to Rachel's presence made Eleanor do something immediately before the problem grows even further. The difference in interests between Philip and Eleanor may be a conflict in Nick and Rachel's relationship.

5. Conclusion

Conflict is a condition that any individual must have experienced in life. Conflict can be in the form of a dispute experienced by oneself or even with other people. Based on the results of the analysis, on the novel *Crazy Rich Asians* by Kevin Kwan, there are two kinds of conflicts, the internal and external conflicts. Some factors causing conflict found in the novel are differences between individuals, cultural differences, and differences in interests. The results of the analysis of the novel are expected to add insight and provide readers with understanding and knowledge in analyzing conflicts in a literary work in the form of a novel.

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