CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background of the study

Nowadays, physical appearance is considered a critical point to determine the value of women. The perceptions of self-worth and self-esteem are based on their physical appearance, including their body weight and body shape (Betzetal 2019, 100). The definition and representation of beauty in society are very subjective. Beauty is a term that practically has a varied meaning. Beautiful women are described with white skin, lean body shape, and silky straight hair. Others may think that beautiful women are fat, having darker skin, curly hair. Thus, beauty somehow depends on someone who is looking (Sekayi 2003). The ideal image of beauty is always relatable with physical attractiveness, which becomes an essential point to concern about women's appearance (Gimlin 2002). Furthermore, every culture had a unique standard of attractiveness derived from traditional views about beauty and the physical features of the people. (Han 2003). However, a phenomenon of cultural assimilation has been found in local cultures that are being integrated into a universal standard of beauty dominated by western ideals such as round eyes, narrow faces, and pronounced noses and called as beauty standards (Kim 2010).

The standard of beauty spread globally, making women have the ambition to fulfill the perfect body and face measure. Beauty standard makes women are competing to get legacy as beautiful women. However, those women who are not

fit with the standard of beauty in society will be considered ugly. The definition of beauty standard becomes oppression for women because it restrains women from expressing their beauty versions. Specifically, media and technology have a vital role in influencing the standard of beauty in society. It is in accordance with women's physical concerns that are affected by the media (Wolf 2002). Mass media reflects fundamental beliefs, attitudes, and values that portrayed women's beautiful images. Media spreading conceptualized of beauty among the society that becomes the stereotype of body shaping. The standard of beauty recognizes the physical appearance of some media figures as the role models and the icon of ideal beauty. Framing refers to the media's ability that emphasized the standard for how women should look and the methods they should employ to look this way.

The beauty standard leads the creation of beauty myth's term based on the concept by Naomi Wolf. The beauty myth is the concept of beauty, which stresses physical appearance and produces the beauty standard as the rule that women must follow to be categorized as beautiful. Historically, beauty myth is the part of the ideology old feminine, which still has the power to control women. Since the 1830s, every generation fights the version of the beauty myth. In addition, in early 1830, the beauty index was also invented. In the 1840s, the media established the first nude photographs of women. Then, in the mid-century, Revolution Industry published the advertisement using images of beautiful women. Furthermore, eighty years later, after the first wave of feminism had subsided, Virginia Woolf, the modernist 20th-century author, stated that it needs some decades to tell the

truth about women's bodies. Since the Industrial Revolution, middle-class Western women have been controlled by ideals and stereotypes by the rise of the beauty myth. (Wolf 2002, 19)

The beauty myth is the primary reason women feel unsatisfied, anxious, and inferior regarding their bodies, which is not according to society's body goals. The beauty myth issue becomes painful for women. They will change their face and bodies to fulfill the beauty ideal. Women's physical appearance becomes an instrument to punish when they feel body dissatisfaction and body hatred (Wolf 1990, 234). Body hatred is damaging women because women will have eating disorders, cosmetic surgery, plastic surgery, and also self-harm. Women's bodies and faces are perceived as elements associated with images that women must control. They are the leading causes of women's attempts, such as diet and makeovers, to improve their bodily images (Frost 2001). Women prefer to suffer from anorexia and bulimia because they do not want to gain weight. Beauty myths consider fat and older women as ugly and unlovable. So, body hatred and body dissatisfaction are the impacts of the beauty myth, making women prefer pain to get the definition of beauty.

Beauty dissatisfaction is widespread in many industrialized settings across the world, especially in the United States. The negative feeling regarding poor body image or body dissatisfaction makes it critical to identify demographic and socio-cultural factors placing women at risk for body shaping. The global beauty standard is prominent both in non-western and western countries. However, the

cultural differences in perceptions of an attractive female to the conception of beauty are becoming homogenized, heavily influenced by Western cultural beauty standards (Isa and Kramer 2003). So, the Westernization of female beauty influences women worldwide, such as Asian-American women, to be beautiful according to the global standard of beauty in society. Furthermore, if we talk about Asian-American women's standards, women admire bigger eyes and higher nose bridges, which are white physical features (Kaw 993, 79). Yu, Park, and Sung (2015, 699) conclude that white women represent ideal beauty in China in their study about cosmetic advertisements in women's magazines in Korea and China. Asian-American women get pressure from socio-cultural that could lead to negative body image (Kawamura 2011). The higher level of perfectionism makes Asian-American women placed at greater risk of feeling body dissatisfaction and have a more inferior body image (Boone, Soenens and Luyten 2014). Asian American females may be more likely to feel body dissatisfaction about their arms, height, breasts, and hips than their non-Asian women (Forbes and Frederick 2008).

Moreover, beauty myth appears to be a matter that is commonly discussed as a problem in contemporary literary works. Specifically, in studying women as the main object in literary works, they will never be separated from the issue of beauty, whether it becomes a minor or major issue in the research. Many literary works, such as a poem, and novel, represent the concept of beauty implemented by many colored women in every aspect of life. One of the previous studies is a novel entitled *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison that discussed an African-

American girl confronting the white beauty standard. Therefore, the writings about women's faces and complexion have been seen as the key to female perfection that often illustrate the pain of facing white images of beauty. Thus, the white beauty standard becomes a complex issue that has already been discussed in many literature studies. Then, the present study's object is a novel that also discussed Asian-American women who are experiencing beauty myth issues.

The novel entitled *Beauty* was written by Christina Chiu. Christina Chiu is the grand prize winner of the James Alan McPherson Award for her novel, *Beauty*. Christina Chiu was born in Taiwan and lived in the United States. She is an Asian-American woman, and she portrayed her life in her novel entitled beauty. She stated that beauty means the frame of mind, integrity, creativity, and power. Those all of the aspects are represented by Amy Wong as the main character in the novel. The novel is the winner of the 2040 Book Award. It was published in 2020. Amy Wong's parents live in Hongkong. However, Amy Wong lives in America, especially in New York. Amy Wong also travels around America, such as Florida and Cambridge. The beauty standard in Amy Wong's life explains that Hongkong has the most beautiful Chinese style from the Chinese perspective. She also stated that Chinese women are not supposed to be fat. In addition, while fulfilling the beauty standard, she got trauma, frustration, and disappointment on self-acceptance. Those problems make her always come to a psychologist because she always feels insecure, anxious, and inferior regarding her physical appearance. The novel also explains that ideal images of beauty become a weapon against women's advancement.

Amy Wong gets pressure from two socio-cultural backgrounds, America and Asia, which have different beauty standards. Asian American women who are living in America are exposed to two sets of cultural values: local culture from China and the United States cultures. (Berry 1997). Asian-American women who are living in the United States feel that their ethnic physical features or body shape are not appreciated in America. The oppression on the standard of body image was portrayed by Amy Wong when she arrived in Hongkong. Amy Wong's mother gives criticism regarding the style of her family that is placed in Asia. It compares Amy Wong as an Asian-American woman who lives in America with her family who lives in Hongkong. It represents that culture, ethnicity, and race have a significant impact on influencing the beauty standard in society. Unfortunately, the beauty concept becomes misleading when it is followed by specific group measures to achieve the unrealistic body image.

This topic is relevant to modern society because Amy Wong represents that beauty myth becomes oppression for women. Consequently, it has an impact on self-acceptance and self-esteem in women. In this modern era, the Industrial Revolution and globalization lead women to change themselves according to society's ideal image. Nowadays, the beauty industry has great potential because women need it to beautify themselves. Women will have low self-esteem, insecurity, anxiety, inferiority, or worse conditions if they have poor body image. On the other hand, a good body image will build up self-confidence and acceptance from society. Beauty myth not only oppressed women in the physical body, but also mental health. So, we as a woman should realize that we will never

be happy if we always try to be beautiful according to society's standard. Women in the modern era should create their beauty standards. It will make them always feel grateful regardless of their body shapes. Therefore, women could dress up, makeup, and adorn themselves to express the definition of beauty based on their standards.

This object is interesting to be discussed because the author of the novel bravely explains how beauty myth limits the freedom of women in the modern era. This novel also tells that beauty myth affected body dissatisfaction, anxiety, and another negative feeling regarding their face and body. The reader could deeply understand the way Amy Wong feels oppressed and discriminated. Christina Chiu as the author, also concludes at the end of the novel by her main character. She teaches that to be gorgeous, we should appreciate ourselves and create our beauty version to avoid body dissatisfaction and body hatred. This study uses the theory of beauty myth from Naomi Wolf that explained *How Images of Beauty are Used Against Women*. Naomi Wong is an American feminist author. She stated that there are six realms that become the concept of beauty myth, consisting of work, religion, culture, hunger, violence, and sexuality. So, this study will analyze more deeply by using the beauty myth's realms by Naomi Wolf.

Based on the studies that have been conducted, the related studies are divided into three parts. The oppression from beauty myth itself, The impact of media and society toward beauty myth, and Socio-cultural background

influencing the beauty myth. Those seven related studies will help the author build the topic, theme, research analysis, finding, and discussion more efficiently. The related studies also give insight into applying beauty myth concepts in the analysis. Significantly, this study differs from the seven related studies in terms of context, methods, and objectives. Furthermore, this study concerns and analyzes that beauty myth becomes a significant power to control and oppress women and explains how women's struggle could build self-acceptance and self-esteem in creating the new definition of beauty.

Thus, there are seven related studies that provided some significant contribution in doing the analysis. The first sub-heading is the oppression from beauty myth itself, and it consists of three related studies. The first study is entitled *Finding Beauty in Scars: A study on beauty represented in Scars to Your Beautiful (2016) Music Video by Alessia Cara* Written by Cut Fadiah Nur Amalia. This study shows that having scars psychologically and physically does not determine someone's beauty. In the study's findings and discussion, the author explains that women who hide their pain, cut their woes away, and change their body and face according to the standard of beauty, can not accept themselves proudly. This study also explains that women are constructed to represent the beauty myth in society. The second study entitled, *The Society Oppression In Constructing The Beauty Standard: A Feminist Reading Of Scott Westerfeld's Novel Uglies* (2016) was written by Febry Fortuna. The concept of ideal beauty in this study only can be reached by plastic surgery. Then, this study's analysis focuses on the physical appearance of ideal beauty, the behavior of ideal beauty,

and the role of government in constructing society's mindset. The third study, entitled *Representation Of Beauty In Ayu Utami's Novels: Wolfian's Beauty Myth Perspective* written by Wahyu Puspita Sari, Yasnur Asri, and Nesa Riska Pangesti. In this study, the research wants to reveal how beauty standards in Indonesia and the contestation between physical beauty and behavior of the female character.

Then, the second topic in related studies will discuss the impact of media and society toward beauty myths. This topic consists of two related studies. The following study, entitled *The Beauty Trap: how the pressure to conform to society's and media's standards of beauty leave women experiencing body dissatisfaction* was written by Samantha Yee Yee Foo. This study explains how self-esteem and body satisfaction relate to each other between feminine beauty and its portrayal by society and media. The author also wants to analyze the women's view regarding the ideal beauty, femininity, body dissatisfaction portrayed through media and culture. The fifth study, entitled *When beauty is the Beast: The Effects of Beauty Propaganda on Female Consumers(2018)* written by Savannah Greenfield. This study discussed to reveal that the beauty and advertising industries have adverse effects on female consumers by providing unrealistic beauty standards and lowering self-esteem. This research has found that the effect of idealized beauty in advertisements harms women's body image, expectation, consumption pattern, and much more.

The last sub-heading will reveal about socio-cultural background influencing the beauty myth. The sixth study entitled *Body image and face image in Asian American and white women: Examining associations with surveillance, construal of self, perfectionism, and socio-cultural pressures (2016)* written by David A. Fredericka, Mackenzie Kelly, Janet Latner, Gaganjyot Sandhu, and Yuying Tsong. The findings emphasize the importance of considering socio-cultural differences when assessing overweight preoccupation, face and body image, and perfectionism. Then, the related study, entitled *Beautification Practices Among Asian And Asian American College Student* written by Itsuka Takamine. This study wants to explain that beauty standards are homogenized as those of the West. Then, Asian individuals are either underrepresented or depicted negatively through media. In this research, the author conducts how Asians and Asian-American women adopt Western beauty standards into their beautification practice. Furthermore, those seven related studies will be elaborated in more detail in the Literature Review, Chapter two.

1.2 Statement of the Problems

1. How is the oppression of beauty myth portrayed in Christina Chiu's Novel entitled Beauty (2020)?

2. How does Amy Wong's, main female character, struggle to create a new meaning of beauty as portrayed in the novel?

1.3   Objective of the Study

1. To analyze how the beauty myth is portrayed in Christina Chiu's novel entitled *Beauty (2020).* This study will reveal that beauty myth becomes oppression for women.

2. To analyze how Amy Wong struggles to accept the beauty myth in society. It will represent Amy Wong's life to create her standard of beauty.

1.4   Significance of the Study

This study gives three significant points. First, provide a deeper understanding and provide more knowledge and insight into feminism ideology, mainly discussing the beauty myth that Naomi Wolf explained. Second, the author hopes the readers, especially women, will get valuable insight into the meaning of beauty standards in society and its impact on self-acceptance and self-esteem. So, it will assist and support women to be self-confident based on their beauty standards. Third, this research is also written to contribute to Universitas Airlangga, especially the Department of English language and literature in the Faculty of Humanity. This study may also be used to reference the next researcher who conducts studies about literature focusing on feminists, especially in beauty myth issues.

1.5 Definition of Key terms

Beauty Myth : The stereotype of beauty, which becomes standard in society on physical appearance, bodies, faces, hair, clothes, becomes essential things. (Wolf 2002, 9)

Body Dissatisfaction : Negative perception and feeling regarding one's body result from a perceived discrepancy between the actual body image. (Cash 1990).

Oppression : Social act of placing severe restrictions, devalued, exploited, and deprived of privileges on an individual group or institution. (Barker 2003, 307)