Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

Literature has become one of the most important instruments for people to deliver their messages to others. Literature can be used as media to share ideas and ideology as well as to portray human life and values exist within society. The existence of literature also has some purposes as explained by Madden (2005) who states that the purpose of literature is to entertain and instruct as well as to delight and enlighten the reader through the use of imagination. Klarer (1998) divides literature into three main genres namely fiction, drama and poetry. Fiction has two main genres which are novel and short story. Different from short story, novel is the genre which produces the most innovations in literature.

In recent years, the awareness of issues about women has been increasing. Women are started to question about their role and position in society. Regarding to that issue, literature can be used as a medium to explore issues about women. However, in the early development, discrimination to women may appear in literary works. It happens because most of the works written were dominated by men. Men tend to put women as the object in their writings. This brings some depressing impacts to the image of women.

It was Mary Wollstonecraft, as one of the early feminist, who marked the first modern awareness of women's struggle for equal rights through her book *A Vindication of The Rights of Women* in 1792. This awareness was inspired by the

French Revolution which was concerned about the equal rights for individuals. It was followed by Virginia Woolf, a British scholar and feminist, who declares that men have and continues to treat women as inferiors. In 1919, her book *The Room of One's Own* has become the foundation for present day feminist literary criticism. She argues that it is men who define what it means to be women and who controls the political, economical, social and literary structures. Based on this fact, feminist literary criticism is developed as a tool for women to fight the gender discrimination not only in literature but also in society.

Hernadi (2005) states that feminist literary criticism explores issue that is relevant to women as authors, as readers, and as fictional characters. It also raises controversial question of the possible existence of distinctly female writing, recognizably different in the character of its language from discourse shaped by male patterns of thought. Meanwhile Humm as cited by Azizah (2006) argues that feminist literary criticism makes an effort to redefine literary concept in terms of gender in order to create a new literary subject. Showalter as cited in Kurniawan (2004) gives her opinions about feminist literary criticism;

> "Feminist literary criticism attempts to focus its analysis on women because thus far the writers and readers of literary works are men so that feminist literary criticism would like to show that women bring perceptions and expectations into their literary experiences"

However, feminist literary criticism may also be applied on a writing that is written by women. This is intended to see how female writers want to express their way of thinking in relation with patriarchal system in society. One novel of which the writer is female is *Shanghai Baby*. This novel is written by Zhou Wei Hui, a Chinese female writer. This novel was first published in 1999 and since

that, it has been banned in China due to its controversial theme. *Shanghai Baby* is a novel that reflects the life of a woman who lives in a patriarchal society in China. In the novel, she experiences many pressures from her society when she decides to pursue her career as a writer. She has to go through several conflicts with her parents and society to reach her ambition as a writer.

The novel itself arrives at the time where many urban youth Chinese generations have challenged their historical and traditional values. The description of the main woman character in the novel is disliked by Chinese people and government because it gives an honest display to some areas that are still considered taboo in China. The clear description of the contemporary Chinese woman in this novel has shocked many people in China because it challenges all traditional expectations to women in China. Thus, this study attempts to analyze characteristics and characterizations of the main woman character in the novel. It is conducted by using feminist literary criticism especially existentialist feminism proposed by Simone de Beauvoir.

1.2 Reason for Choosing the Topic

When *Shanghai Baby* was originally published in China in 1999, it has received many negative responses from Chinese people and government. Some controversial issues raised in this novel have placed Wei Hui, as the writer, into a position where she becomes an opposition for Chinese public and government. The portrayal of contemporary Chinese woman in the novel is still unacceptable for the elder generation because it describes about the woman's independence and

awakening in China. *Shanghai Baby* challenges all traditional expectations to women in China. Through the main woman character in the novel, Wei Hui seems to try to deliver a message about gender equalities to her readers as well as trying to help women of her generation to understand themselves better. *Shanghai Baby* was banned by the Chinese authorities in April 2000 where 40.000 copies were publicly burned. However, the pirated version of this book has been sold in great quantities in China and *Shanghai Baby* has also been translated into English in 2001.

1.3 Scope of the Study

This study investigates the portrayal of a contemporary Chinese woman and feminism issues raised by the author in the novel *Shanghai Baby* by using existentialist feminism perspective. This paper attempts:

1. To find out the portrayal of a contemporary Chinese woman presented by the author in the novel *Shanghai Baby*.

2. To investigate the feminism issues raised by the author in the novel *Shanghai Baby*.

1.4 Research Questions

This study is conducted to answer the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of a contemporary Chinese woman portrayed in the novel *Shanghai Baby*?

2. What feminism issues are raised by the author in the novel *Shanghai Baby*?

1.5 Aims of Study

The result of this study is expected:

1. To reveal the portrayal of a contemporary Chinese woman in the novel *Shanghai Baby*.

2. To reveal the feminism issues raised by the author in the novel · *Shanghai Baby*.

1.6 Research Method

Feminist literary criticism is used in analyzing the subject of the research. The feminist literary criticism itself will be focused on existentialist feminism perspective. These theories may give a different and new perspective in reading the novel. The novel is also analyzed in the framework of qualitative descriptive study. According to Patton as cited in Kurniawan (2004), qualitative approach consists of three kinds of data collection; in-dept, open-ended interview and written document.

Qualitative approach also gives an interpretative flexibility that is both 'reflexive and reactive' to the concepts and theories which emerge from the data findings (Morgan, Drury, 2003). This is also supported by Maxwell (1996) who states that qualitative approach focuses on specific situations or people and emphasizes on words rather than numbers.

Nazir (1988) states that descriptive method is a method used in the research of an object, a set of condition, a system of thought and event which take place in the present time. Gal L.R. as cited in Anggraeni (2004) says:

> "A descriptive method is a method of research that involves collecting data in order to test hypothesis or to answer question concerning the current status of the subject of the study"

The goal of descriptive method is to describe or illustrate the fact, characteristic and relationship of research elements systematically, factually and accurately. It is concerned with the subjective point of view and it will be close to the data.

1.7 Data Resources

Data are transcription gained from some significant parts of the novel that used as device. It is also supported by other resources which are gained from articles, internet, books and other sources which are related to feminist literary criticism and existentialist feminism perspective.

1.8 Clarification of Terms

Some terms are clarified to avoid misunderstanding. The terms are:

o **Portrayal** refers to the act of showing or describing somebody or something in a picture (Hornby, 2000)

o **Novel** is a fictitious prose narrative or tale of considerable length (now usually one long enough to fill one or more volumes) in which characters and actions representative of the real life of past or present are portrayed in a plot or more or less complexity (Hawthorn, 2001)

o **Existentialist Feminism** is a theory developed by a French feminist Simone de Beauvoir who states that patriarchal system defines what it means to be women and put women in the subordinate position and considered to be "the other" (Bressler, 1998)

o **Patriarchy** is derives from Greek word *patria* meaning father and *arché* meaning rule. Patriarchy is the anthropological term used to define the sociological condition where male members of a society tend to predominate in positions of power; with the more powerful the position, the more likely it is that a male will hold that position. The term patriarchy is also used in systems of ranking male leadership in certain hierarchical churches or religious bodies (Wikipedia Encyclopedia, 2006)

1.9 The Organization of the Paper

Chapter 1 : Introduction

This chapter consists of background, reason for choosing the topic, scope of the study, research questions, aims of the study, research method, data resources, clarification of terms and the organization of the paper.

Chapter 2 : Theoretical Foundation

This chapter covers some theories which are related to the research. Those theories are about novel, character and characterizations, women in China, stereotypes of women in China, feminist literary criticism and existentialist feminism.

Chapter 3 : Research Methodology

This chapter deals with method of the research, research procedure, subject of the research, technique of data collection and technique of data analysis.

Chapter 4 : Findings and Discussion

This chapter consists of findings and discussion of the research

Chapter 5 : Conclusion and Suggestions

This chapter covers conclusions and suggestions which are related to the research.