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## YANG NAIMEI - LIFE PRACTICE OF A CHINESE "FLAPPER" OF WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT IN CHINA

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**Abstract:** As one of the earliest movie stars in China, Yang Naimei's life reflects the process of professionalization and modernization of Chinese women in the early 20th century. This study discusses the life practices and significance of Yang Naimei as a Chinese flapper. *Flapper* refers to the modern girl who arose in Europe and America in the 1920s as a challenge to traditional lifestyles. Yang Naimei fully embodied the characters of the flapper. She often played an unruly woman on the screen, and she had many relationships in her life, accumulating wealth and a reputation with her acting career. However, society at that time did not provide enough space for the sustainable development of the women's generation, like Yang Naimei, in economic, political and personal life. After the loss of her youth, she was disposed of by the film industry and suffered from poverty and disease in the latter half of her life. Taking Yang Naimei as an illustration of the times can reflect the twists and turns in the treatment of Chinese women offered by the society.

**Keywords:** Chinese film. Flapper. Life Practice. Women Development.

### INTRODUCTION

The women's development was an important part of the modernization process of China in the 20th century. It is meaningful work to show the efforts and difficulties women have made and faced in the early process of professionalism and socialization. As a film star, Yang Naimei (杨耐梅) was a

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representative of professional women in early China. Understanding her life will help us understand the Chinese women's modernization process.

In Shanghai in the 1920s, the most modern city at that time, a group of women at the forefront of trends of the time appeared. They cut their hair short and wore wester-style skirts showing their legs. They accepted modern education, participated in public life, fell in love freely and sought professional development. Their lifestyle had its origins in “flapper” fashion, popular in the West in the early twentieth century. A group of women celebrities in Shanghai is the clearest embodiment of the Chinese flapper. Yang Naimei, a famous star of the 1920s, had a flapper's all the characteristics. Naimei was considered “beautiful and romantic” by the film world of the time and was also called a “modern beauty” by later researchers (ZHANG, 2009, p. 93). But let's ignore the labels given by masculine erotic projection and situate Yang Naimei in the flappers' intellectual tradition instead. By doing this, we can discover that a woman's efforts to achieve social resources, professional success and an independent existence are hidden beneath her “beautiful and romantic” image. Her tragic conclusion also demonstrates how tough it is for women to mature throughout the challenging shift of China from tradition to modernity.

## 1 “FEIBO GIRL”: A MODERN GIRL IN 1920s CHINA

*Flapper* refers to the modern girls of 1920s western society and their challenge to traditional lifestyles. They danced, drank, smoked chic cigarettes, had short hair, wore straight flat-chested tube skirts, showed off their legs and displayed their romantic feelings. They had the right to vote and began to develop professional lives (ZEITZ, 2007, p. 14).

As early as 1914, English newspapers and magazines in Shanghai discussed the flapper, describing her as a naive, lively and curious young girl. In the 1920s, the discussion of this word began to develop a political significance. An author with the pen name of An Zhi interpreted the flapper as “the most powerful among the new women,” saying that the emergence of these women resulted from the passage of the British Gender Equality Act. If we want to find the corresponding Chinese vocabulary, An Zhi (1929, p. 265) thinks that “embroidered room girl” is relatively similar, emphasizing as it does the flapper's professional identity. In the 1930s, some proposed

translating *flapper* as a "modern woman" or even "demon." The latter clearly indicated a negative attitude towards the flapper's lifestyle (WEI, 1933, p. 16).

In her book *Performing China: Women Stars, Performing Culture, Visual Politics, 1910-1945*, Taiwanese scholar Zhou Huiling translates the word *flapper* as "Feibo girl." *Feibo* means "to wink at someone." Huiling argues that the flapper has become a symbol not only of the first wave of women's liberation in the United States after the European war but also of the peak of "jazz culture" in the film industry and literary scene of the 1920s (ZHOU, 2004, p. 119). She also points out that flappers appeared in popular magazines in Shanghai around 1926 and were imitated by movie actresses. Yang Naimei was the foremost figure of this trend (ZHOU, 2004, p. 118).

Zhang Caihong (2011, p. 60) summarizes Zhou Huiling's description of the flapper and of Yang Naimei's artistic image in her thesis *Rebellious Angel: An Artistic Image of Early Chinese Actress Yang Naimei*, as well as in her monograph *Body Politics: A Study of Chinese Women Film Stars of the Past 100 Years*. She writes that Yang Naimei exhibited several flapper characteristics, including fashion, debauchery, decadence and that she dared to challenge tradition. However, "[...] traditional consciousness and the resistance of a male-dominated society made their ability to break through the encirclement in a flash. The only thing left behind are historical facts and regret, and a living legend has been achieved [...]" (ZHANG, 2009, p. 93).

Why is Yang Naimei regarded as the representative of Chinese flappers? What are the similarities between her and the western flappers?

In the 1920s, a number of female celebrities, including Hollywood silent cinema stars Clara Bow (1905-1965) and Mary Louise Brooks (1906-1985), emerged from the flapper craze in the United States. "It", a 1925 movie in which Bow starred as a brilliant girl attempting to seduce wealthy businessmen, is considered to be Bow's most well-known work. Bow's character is very consistent with her on-screen demeanour. She was a flapper's epitome, according to F. Scott Fitzgerald, who once described her as being stunning, haughty, incredibly self-assured and exceedingly clever. Lois Brooks Charleston's image, dancing on screen, is recognised as a classic of the "boomerang" genre. Lois Brooks is most known for playing the seductive woman Lulu in *Pandora's Box* (1929), and she is best known for this role. However, the flapper's most representative characters are not Bow and Brooks but Zelda Fitzgerald (1900-1948), a famous American social figure, writer

and painter of the twentieth century. Fitzgerald not only practiced a flapper's lifestyle but also explored this identity of social trend. In their respective works, Kelly Boyer Sagert and Joshua Zeit regard Fitzgerald as a symbol of the flapper trend (SAGERT, 2006, p. 102).

Zelda Fitzgerald, the novelist Francis Scott Fitzgerald's wife, is also the prototype of women characters in *The Great Gatsby* and *Tender Is the Night*. Born in an upper-class family, she was famous for her beauty and unruly in middle school, attracting many suitors. One of the most dependable pursuers was Fitzgerald. She was talented in the arts and had a strong drive for success. She spent a lot of time writing and creating art, and because she was too exhausted to practise dancing, she was hurt. Fitzgerald's writings are particularly sensitive and romantic in a female way. She attracted some interest, but Fitzgerald's reputation was not as strong as she had hoped given the continued dominance of male taste in the literary and artistic worlds at the time.

Like many other flappers, Fitzgerald enjoyed luxurious parties, fashionable costumes, romantic love and the material consumption brought on by rapid economic development. In her articles, she repeatedly placed the flapper's lifestyle in the context of urban expansion and the rise of the middle class in the 1920s. But at the same time, she also had an obvious sense of tragedy. For her to be a flapper meant to choose "[...] the right to experiment with herself as a transient, poignant figure who will be dead tomorrow." (FITZGERALD, 1997, p. 433). Her prophecy came true as her life went forward. She constantly needed to consult doctors starting in 1930 because of her mental disorder. She spent the majority of her final years in hospitals and sanatoriums and passed away at the age of 48 in a hospital fire.

The latter half of Bow's and Brooks's lives are also full of tragedy. Bow married in the 1930s and later separated from her husband, the governor of Nevada, because of her mental illness. He died of a heart attack in the 1960s. Brooks also married and then divorced. In the 1930s, she quit the film industry and went on to work as a dance teacher, radio actor, columnist and salesperson. She was addicted to alcohol and, in her later years, suffered from arthritis and emphysema that she failed to get adequate treatment for (SOMERVILLE, 2012, p. 103).

Fashion and glamour, controversial reputations, ambition for money and achievement, and many romantic relationships are common features of

Fitzgerald's, Bow's, and Brooks's lives. By comparing Yang Naimei with these flappers on the other side of the ocean, we will find that she not only borrows the flapper's style in appearance but also in other respects, such as career development, intimate relationships and even forms of illness and death.

## 2 FAME, WEALTH AND SCANDAL: YANG NAIMEI'S FILM STAR CAREER

Yang Naimei (1904-1960) was born into a wealthy family in Guangdong Province. She studied at the Wuben, Aiguo and Qiming schools in Shanghai. She had been passionate about acting since middle school, often visited film companies and even acted in films from a young age. In 1924, the Star Film Company invited her to play the role of Yun Qian. Naimei's performance is natural and fluid. Director Zhang Shichuan (1996, p. 405) said that her talent was higher than that Wang Hanlun's one, who plays the heroine in the same film. Afterwards, Naimei starred in *Young Lady's Fan*, *Orchid in an Empty Valley* and *Resurrection of Conscience*, which welcomed large audiences and received high praise from the media. Naimei, with her outstanding acting skills and constant anecdotes told about her, became a social celebrity of great renown. Naimei established the Naimei Film Company in 1928 and raised a sizable sum of money to produce *The Miracle Woman*. Later, poor management rendered the corporation incapable of surviving. After being married, Naimei's influence on the industry slowly decreased. She entered the sound film period in the 1930s. After her family broke up, Naimei was found panhandling in Hong Kong in the 1950s. When word got out, Naimei was given to her adopted daughter, who raised her in Taiwan until her death in Taipei in 1960.

Among movie stars of the 1920s, Naimei was known for her bold dress (Figure 1). As can be seen from the photos published in the newspapers then, Yang Naimei often wore a bobo head, long pearl necklace, straight flat-chested tube skirt or robe and bare legs— a flapper's all the classic elements. Naimei's fashionable dress led other women to follow suit. After Naimei went to Changsha to perform in 1927, the "Naimei costume" appeared in Changsha. The so-called plum dress is a straight sleeveless skirt. At that time, the report described it as "equivalent to our so-called sweat jacket, shaped like a long tube, from the breast to the knee, with double bands hanging over the shoulder" (Figure 2). Because this kind of outfit is "[...] as thin as cicada wings, the skin is often visible," and the director of public security of Changsha

issued an order to prohibit it in order to maintain decency (WANGXIANG, 1929, p. 348).

**Figure 1** - The main character of this film (*Her Pain*) is Yang Naimei



(ZHANG, 1996).

**Figure 2** - Yang Naimei's stay in Beijing



(WANGXIANG, 1929, p. 349).

Matching Naimei's fashionable style were her uninhibited words and actions. On the screen, she played the role of a social butterfly and prostitute; in her personal life, she had relationships with male stars such as Zhu Fei and Wang Jiting.

Naimei's first well-known character was Yunqian in *The Jade Pear Soul*. Yunqian is not the kind of romantic girl that Naimei became known for playing afterwards. In the first half of the story, she is a proud student, and later she becomes a bitter wife who searches for her husband for thousands of miles. However, because Yang Naimei's romantic image became so typical, some scholars of later generations mistakenly believed that Yun Qian was also this type, describing her as a beautiful and dissolute "social butterfly" or "[...] a young girl engaging in perverse behavior." (ZHANG, 2014, p. 43).

Although Naimei entered the film world with a good woman's role like Yunqian, Zhang Shichuan writes that Naimei "[...] is particularly suited to play the kind of romantic woman because of her unrestrained private life." (XU, 2014, p. 4). Thus, most of the roles Yang Naimei took on were romantic girls. For example, in the 1926 film *The Roses Bloom Everywhere in April*, Naimei played a social butterfly's role, who flirts with different men; in *Resurrection of Conscience* of the same year, Yang played a maid whom the young master has abandoned. In the 1927 film *Spring Dream by the Lake*, Naimei played a charming young woman. And in the 1928 film *President of Huaguo*, Naimei played a famous prostitute's role.

Naimei's performance won her great admiration. Bao Tianxiao, the screenwriter of *Resurrection of Conscience*, once praised Naimei, saying: "It's a wonderful performance. I admire [how the heroine chases the train] (BAO, 2014, p. 532). That day, Naimei worked hard and went straight to the end of the platform. She came back gloomy. This is still a silent movie! But this scene is really silent is better than sound at this time. When we look at it, we don't feel sad." (ZHANG, 1996, p. 405).

Zhang Weitao, director of *President of Huaguo*, said: "Naimei is good at the performance of romanticism. In this play, she is especially good at it. She describes the different personalities of Zhou Miaoying and the president of Huaguo profoundly and uniquely." (BAO, 2014, p. 520).

What is particularly noteworthy is Naimei's performance in *Spring Dream by the Lake* (Figure 3). In the film, Naimei plays the lover in a young scholar's dream. In the plan, she asks the young man to accept her whipping

him to prove his love for her. She whips him relentlessly and then hugs him and kisses his wound (ZHANG, 2006, p. 318).

**Figure 3** - Yang Naimei and Gong Jianong negotiate in *Spring Dream by the Lake*



(ZHANG, 2006, p. 318).

As to Naimei's role, Zhang subtly commented:

When she wanted to whip Sun Pijiang but didn't get his permission, she looked annoyed but not annoyed. She turned her eyes and bit her upper lip with her teeth, and her body moved slightly. I'm not afraid of being abrupt. I dare to say that this is the so-called willful but unspeakable masturbation. At this point, she can stand head and shoulders above the rest. (ZHENG, 1996, p. 1039).

With her excellent acting skills and the media attention she was receiving, Naimei ushered in the peak of her career in the second half of the 1920s. Her movies, such as *Young Lady's Fan* and *Orchid in an Empty Valley*, cleaned up at the box office. During the release of *Resurrection of Conscience*, Naimei personally appeared on the stage to reenact vividly a scene from the film. At the same time, she sang the theme song "Ru Niang Qu," which received a thunderous applause from the audience. Thereafter, she was often invited to perform songs on the stage and sometimes could be found surrounded by the audience after the performance. Sanyou, the China brothers, Tianhua and other tobacco companies invited Naimei to be in their advertisements

(QIAN, 1927, p. 48). Other tobacco companies also used Naimei's image without authorization, for which she took them to court (WU, 1928, p. 23).

But Naimei's ambition was more than that. She was not always willing to listen to what the director told her to do. She planned to set up her own film company and make the films she wanted to shoot.

It is expensive to start a film production firm. After learning the news, Zhang Zongchang, the warlord of the Shandong Province, extended an invitation to Yang Naimei to a conference in Jinan with an offer to invest. The popularity of Zhang Zongchang was low. Naimei's acquaintances at the time cautioned her against accepting out of concern that doing so would put her in the hands of evil and make it impossible for her to escape. Naimei hesitated protractedly. Nothing risks, nothing wins. Finally, she went north to attend the appointment and brought back a large sum of money to set up the Naimei Film Company. From then on, public opinion cursed Naimei for not demonstrating "self-love" and for being "degenerate." Naimei, on the other hand, was bolder, buying luxury houses and new cars, raising wolfhounds, holding wine parties frequently and arming herself with exaggerated luxury.

In 1928, the Naimei Film Company was officially established and began to shoot its only film, *The Miracle Woman*. It is based on real events. The character's prototype is Yu Meiyang, the news of whose suicide in a river sent out shockwaves. Meiyang, who was Cantonese, had run away from home to escape her unhappy arranged marriage. She found many lovers in Guangzhou, Shanghai, Nanyang and became a famous social butterfly. Gradually, the drifting life caused Meiyang to feel empty and meaningless. She committed suicide in 1928 on the ferry from Hong Kong to Shanghai. At the age of thirty-one, she left a suicide note containing expressions of her disappointment with society.

Yu Meiyang's actions resonated deeply with Naimei. She spent a lot of effort setting up the shooting team for *Strange Woman* and cast herself as the lead. In her lifetime, Meiyang's story was very well known. A rich businessman agreed to pay 3,000 yuan to Meiyang for prostitution, but only half of the amount was paid when she went to the appointment. Meiyang then immediately threw a silver dollar out of the window. Passersby roared and scrambled, and Meiyang burst into laughter. Naimei attached great importance to this act and regarded it as a key scene of the film (FENG, 2013, p. 124).

It is not difficult to understand why Naimei valued this act. In it, Naimei's and Meiyuan's images are closely linked. Behind the scenes, there was helplessness, anger and ridicule that could not be concealed.

Naimei promoted *The Miracle Woman* after it was made by taking a number of leading stars of the movie on a promotional tour. *The Miracle Woman* had strong ticket sales and made a sizable profit thanks to many people's efforts. Sadly, Naimei's film firm was unable to keep up this momentum. She developed opium and gambling addictions. Every day, she spent hundreds of thousands of silver dollars, depleting the assets. Naimei, who had a tough life before the 1930s, cleaned up her spirit and retook control of the drama, but her charisma was not as strong as it had been. At 28, she first appeared in the media as a middle-aged woman who was beginning to lose her appeal. The era in which Naimei had dominated the film business was over. She was younger than Hu Die and Ruan Lingyu; both are like the sun in the sky. In 1932, Naimei married Chen Junjing, Chen Shaobai's son (QING, 1928, p. 46). She had to keep a low profile because the Chen family's elders did not agree with this marriage at all. After marriage, Naimei went with Junjing to settle in Hong Kong. She had no children but adopted a daughter.

Later, Naimei made a failed comeback attempt. In the turmoil of the world, the couple's two assets were exhausted, and they broke off their relationship. Naimei, poor, sick and lonely, was finally reduced to begging.

### 3 YANG NAIMEI'S DECLINE AND THE FLAPPER'S DILEMMA

It is easy to attribute failure to Yang Naimei's extravagance when she was young. However, if we compare the other female movie stars of the 1920s and 1930s with Naimei, we can see that things are not so simple. Ruan Lingyu died of suicide in the mid-1930s. Zhou Xuan was cheated on by her lover and lost almost all her property. She collapsed and died in 1957. Zhang Zhiyun, the first film queen, died in Hong Kong in the mid-1970s due to poverty and illness. Before her death, she used to sleep in the street and beg. Few of these female stars of the 1920s and 1930s could enjoy their old age like Hu Die (Table 1).

**Table 1** - Female stars of the 1920s–1930s who died of poverty or suicide.

Name	Year of Birth	Representative Work	Cause of Death
Olive Young	1903	<i>At the End of Her Rope</i>	Died of pneumonia at the age of 37 during a performance in the United States.
Naimei Yang	1904	<i>Spring Dream by the Lake</i>	Begged on the streets of Hong Kong in the 1950s and died of illness in Taipei in 1960.
Zhiyun Zhang	1904	<i>A Sincerely Pity Girl</i>	Begged on the streets of Hong Kong in the 1960s and died in poverty in the 1970s.
Lingyu Ruan	1910	<i>The Dream of the Ancient Capital</i>	Committed suicide at the age of 25.
Xia Ai	1912	<i>Spring Silkworms</i>	Committed suicide at the age of 22.

From the author's own arrangement.

Why is hard to escape from so many flappers' fate of madness, disease and poverty? What factors made Fitzgerald, Bow and Brooks, despite a different cultural context, share Yang Naimei, Zhang Zhiyun, Ruan Lingyu and others' similar fate?

We must go back to their respective eras and social backgrounds to find the answer. In the 1920s, American society was experiencing dramatic changes. Attendance at larger universities doubled between 1915 and 1930. The number of cars on the road increased from 6.8 million in 1919 to 122 million in 1929. During the same period, the urban population of the United States exceeded half of the total population for the first time. In 1920, women officially earned the right to vote with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment (GONG, 2103, p. 122). In the same year, 8.3 million women over the age of fifteen worked outside the home in the United States, making up 23.6% of the labor force. Contraceptives were now widely accessible because of social activists like Margaret Sanger, dramatically enhancing women's power over their bodies.

Before these changes, family and childbirth had almost been women's whole lives. Margaret Sanger's mother, for example, had eleven children and

seven miscarriages before she died in 1899. In Sanger's memory, his mother was always in a state of weakness and lethargy. She believes excessive childbearing had deprived her mother of her health and life. In the 1920s, young women with a professional income did not have to spend all their time giving birth and caring for their families. After work, they could put on lipstick, order a gin in the bar and allocate their spare time according to their wishes.

Although American society has given women some more room, it was still quite constrained. At that time, the majority of women worked in low-wage sectors like the service, entertainment, textile and garment industries. Their youth and vitality were cruelly consumed by these jobs, and once they reached adulthood, they were eliminated. These were insecure and temporary professions, in contrast to the lawyers, engineers, surgeons and government officials' more specialized work, which remained inaccessible to them. The middle-aged flappers could not find their place in society. Their income, prestige and status could not increase like their male counterparts' ones. When their youth was over, most found themselves.

In the same period, China, like the United States, was also facing a rapid social transformation, although the background of its agricultural society and still-looming history of its ancient empire made this transformation more difficult. For the Chinese at the time, the car was still a novel foreign product. The urbanization process had just begun, and most of the population still lived in rural areas. In a small number of rapidly developing cities, a small number of professional women began to appear. In Nanjing in 1928, women accounted for 8.7 percent of the total employees (WU, 1928, p. 23). In 1930, the results of an investigation by the Nanjing National Government in twenty-seven cities, in nine provinces, showed that the number of working women was 374,000 (SAGERT, 2010, p. 3). Zhang Jingsheng, a sex educator and birth control practitioner, wrote a history of sexuality and gave several presentations on sex education in the second half of the 1920s. These works were released publicly and derided by the general public as literary demons.

From this, we can see that Yang Naimei, the flapper of China, would feel more disconnected from her cultural background than Zelda Fitzgerald had on the other side of the ocean. Naimei was born in Guangdong, where the atmosphere was open. She had not bound her feet as a child. However, most of the women of her time still had lotus feet. Naimei yearned for romantic love in the modern sense, but at this time, the restrictions on women's sexual morality were still very harsh, while society was much more permissive toward men.

Naimei had many romantic relationships, which were regarded as immoral for her, although it was considered elegant for a man to take concubines or prostitutes. Naimei's photos were often arranged in the newspapers and magazines alongside famous concubines or prostitutes.

A well-known scandal in the 1920s illustrates the differences in moral attitudes toward male and female sexuality. Xu Zhimo fell in love with Lin Huiyin. In 1922, he divorced his first wife, Zhang Youyi, but failed in his proposal to Huiyin. Later, he married Lu Xiaoman. Zhang Youyi was an old-fashioned woman. After her divorce, she was asked not to be Xu Zhimo's wife but still to be Xu's daughter-in-law (BERNARD, 2000, p. 19). Zhang Youyi thus still served Xu Zhimo's family wholeheartedly for a long time and even looked after Lu Xiaoman when he had no money. In such an atmosphere, we can imagine how difficult it was for women to be independent.

Female stars, shop assistants, saleswomen, servers and clerks had long been seen as service providers who ought to answer the men's requirements throughout the early phase of Chinese women's professionalization in the 1920s. They were merely the objects of service; their role had changed from that of serving a specific guy in the home to that of servicing societal male consumer groups. The main connections in this service are those involving sexual desire and the giving of emotional value. The women were to be discarded once these items were no longer accessible. In *Zhou Xuan: A Singer of the Generation*, Shen Ji once recorded such an event: in 1954, Xinhua Film Company of Hong Kong brought together Yang Naimei, Zhang Zhiyun and Wu Suxin, these down-and-out old stars, to take part in the film *Beauty in Heaven*. But a fire that broke out nearly burned these three famous old beauties of the 1930s in "heaven." The shooting plan failed, and they were considered to be the ones who had brought bad luck (ZHENG, 2010, p. 149). The paragraph describing the event is full of the older women's malicious ridicule. Shen Ji then explains that it was precisely because of the tragedy, which befell Yang Naimei, that Zhou Xuan was eager to marry a reliable man, who ended up cheating her out of all of her assets.

Aging is cruel and fatal to the flappers. From this, we can see why Yang Naimei crazily squandered her money and youth when she was young and why Zelda Fitzgerald, who was born into a good family and had a romantic marriage, indulged in creation in the latter half of her life with an attitude of extraordinary self-suffering. They tried to preserve their earlier lifestyles as they aged, but all their lives ended in tragedy.

The interplay between flappers and society has been disastrous from the start. In this historical period, women required space to grow and expand out as well as the chance to do new things, but the war was fought against rigid social conventions.

The price they paid for the fight was particularly high. Even in the best of times, Yang Naimei was under great pressure and constantly worry. The media enjoyed talking about her anecdotes while also criticizing her. This brought her great trouble. Some newspapers and magazines reported triumphantly that Naimei had invited reporters to a high-end restaurant for dinner and asked them to stop reporting her negative news (ZHANG, 2011, p. 126). Naimei's love life was also unsatisfactory. During her cohabitation with Wang Jiting, the two were in constant conflict, even falling things and scolding each other. Jiting took Naimei's money and did not pay it back, which led to Naimei having to extort debts by suicidally swallowing tobacco soil (SHEN, 1999, p. 180).

After Naimei's marriage, much of the media praised her for finally finding a home and becoming a good wife. However, in this so-called good marriage, Naimei had to constantly seek medical advice regarding having a son (SHI, 1926, p. 123). And, like many other wives at the time, she had to keep fighting with her husband's mistress (DAO, 1927, p. 23).

Nearly a hundred years later, the problems faced by Zelda Fitzgerald and Yang Naimei have not completely disappeared, and gender discrimination still exists in different forms. In the United States of today, many professional fields are still not fully open to women, and there has still been no female president in American history. In China, the preference for boys in families is still obvious. According to the sixth census data, the male-to-female ratio of newborns is 118:100 (FEI, 1935, p. 12). Men's employment opportunities are higher than women's, and women still find it more difficult to be promoted than men.

Nevertheless, compared with one hundred years ago, women have more space and choices in both professional and personal life. In 2015, American women already controlled more than half of the wealth of the nation (SAN, 1936, p. 4), and in 2020, working women accounted for 49.5 percent of the total labor force in the nonagricultural sector. In China, as of 2018, women employees accounted for 43.7 percent of the total number of employed people

and 47.9 percent of the population, aged six and above, with higher education (FREEDMAN, 1974, p. 373).

## CONCLUSION

From a historical point of view, before 1911, the female models of traditional China were virtuous women confined behind the inner curtain all their lives; after 1949, the female models of the People's Republic of China were women who were successful at work. In between the two, flappers like Yang Naimei are the indispensable link in women's development. Their departure from the family opened up the process of women's socialization and indicated a significant change in the distribution pattern of social responsibility and power between the sexes. Although they are often flattened into fashionable girls, who wore exotic clothes and liked to flirt, as Freedman (1974, p. 383) says in her oft-cited paper "The New Woman: Changing Views of Women in the 1920s," sexual independence is only the most sensational prelude to the change the women's status, while political and economic equality is the backing. Even now, gender equality is still a long-term goal and distant dream to be realized.

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**Resumo:** Yang Naimei (杨耐梅) é uma estrela de cinema chinesa da primeira metade do século XX. O estudo discute a prática de vida e o significado de Yang Naimei como uma *flapper* chinesa. *Flapper* se refere à garota moderna que cresceu na Europa e na América, na década de 1920, e desafia o estilo de vida tradicional. Yang Naimei é boa em atuar como uma mulher indisciplinada, na tela. Ela teve muitos relacionamentos em sua vida. Ela acumulou riqueza e reputação com sua carreira de atriz, que incorpora totalmente as características da *flapper*. No entanto, a sociedade da época não oferecia espaço suficiente para o desenvolvimento sustentável da geração de mulheres, como Yang Naimei, na vida econômica, política e pessoal. Com a sua juventude passada, ela foi eliminada pela indústria cinematográfica e sofreu com a pobreza e a doença, na segunda metade de sua vida. Tomando Yang Naimei como uma silhueta dos tempos, pode-se refletir sobre as voltas e reviravoltas do caminho de desenvolvimento das mulheres chinesas.

**Palavras-chave:** Filme chinês. *Flapper*. Prática de Vida. Desenvolvimento Feminino.

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