

# The Last Days of Old China: A Witness to the End of an Era

In the waning years of the Qing dynasty, as China grappled with foreign imperialism and internal strife, a young man named Harold Acton arrived in Beijing. A budding poet and aesthete, Acton was drawn to the decaying grandeur of the imperial city and the enigmatic culture of its people. In this captivating memoir, Acton recounts his extraordinary experiences during his time in China, offering a unique and insightful perspective on the twilight of a great civilization.



## Peking Story: The Last Days of Old China (New York Review Books Classics) by David Kidd

★★★★☆ 4.6 out of 5

Language : English  
File size : 1006 KB  
Text-to-Speech : Enabled  
Screen Reader : Supported  
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled  
Word Wise : Enabled  
Print length : 208 pages



Acton first arrived in Beijing in 1932, at the age of 22. He had come to China on a whim, drawn by a sense of adventure and a desire to experience a culture that was both exotic and ancient. He quickly fell in love with the city, with its bustling streets, its magnificent palaces, and its vibrant cultural life. He spent his days exploring the city's hidden corners, meeting with local scholars, and learning about Chinese history and

culture. He also became a regular visitor to the Forbidden City, where he was granted unprecedented access to the private apartments of the last emperor, Puyi.

Acton's memoir is filled with vivid descriptions of the people and places he encountered during his time in China. He writes about the eunuchs who served the emperor, the concubines who lived in the Forbidden City, and the foreign diplomats who flocked to Beijing. He also describes the city's vibrant street life, its bustling markets, and its colorful temples. Acton's writing is both lyrical and informative, and he brings to life the sights, sounds, and smells of old China.

Acton's time in China came to an end in 1939, when the Japanese invaded Beijing. He was forced to flee the city, and he eventually made his way back to England. However, he never forgot his experiences in China, and he continued to write about the country throughout his life. His memoir, *The Last Days of Old China*, is a classic work of travel literature, and it remains one of the most insightful and evocative accounts of China in the early 20th century.

### **A Unique Perspective on the End of an Era**

Acton's memoir is particularly valuable because it offers a unique perspective on the end of the Qing dynasty. As a foreigner who was both an observer and a participant in Chinese society, Acton was able to see the decline of the empire from a unique vantage point. He witnessed the growing influence of foreign powers in China, the rise of nationalism, and the increasing unrest among the Chinese people. He also saw the last days of the imperial court, and he was present at the abdication of the last emperor, Puyi.

Acton's memoir is not simply a historical document, however. It is also a deeply personal account of a young man's coming of age in a foreign land. Acton arrived in China as a naive and inexperienced youth, but he left as a mature and worldly man. His experiences in China shaped his life and his work, and they helped him to develop a deep understanding of the complexities of Chinese culture and history.

### **A Timeless Classic**

The Last Days of Old China is a timeless classic that continues to be read and enjoyed by people around the world. It is a valuable historical document, a fascinating travelogue, and a deeply personal memoir. Acton's writing is both lyrical and informative, and he brings to life the sights, sounds, and smells of old China. The Last Days of Old China is a must-read for anyone who is interested in Chinese history, culture, or travel.



Harold Acton (1904-1994) was an English poet, novelist, biographer, and travel writer. He is best known for his memoir, *The Last Days of Old China*, which was published in 1947. Acton was a close friend of the Chinese writer Eileen Chang, and he translated many of her works into English. He also wrote extensively about Chinese art and culture.



## **Peking Story: The Last Days of Old China (New York Review Books Classics)** by David Kidd

★★★★☆ 4.6 out of 5

Language : English  
File size : 1006 KB  
Text-to-Speech : Enabled  
Screen Reader : Supported  
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled  
Word Wise : Enabled

Print length : 208 pages

FREE

DOWNLOAD E-BOOK



## The True Story of One Family's Journey from War-Torn Austria to the Ghettos of Poland

In the heart of Europe, where the horrors of the Holocaust unfolded, there is a story of resilience and survival that deserves to be told. This is the story...



## The Enduring Love of The Tayamni Second Edition: A Literary Analysis

The Tayamni Second Edition, a literary masterpiece that has stood the test of time, has enthralled readers worldwide with its poignant narrative...