



# Old Madam Yin: A Memoir of Peking Life

*Ida Pruitt*

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## **Old Madam Yin: A Memoir of Peking Life** Ida Pruitt

By the author of the classic *A Daughter of Han*, this is an affectionate, revealing portrait of an old, wealthy widow and her family in the Peking of the 1920s and early 1930s. Through the daily life and the memories of a shrewd, forthright Lao Tai-tai, we are given an intimate glimpse into centuries-old way of life that was fast coming to an end.

We explore the inner workings of an upper-class urban family: the relations between husbands wives and between wives and concubines, the interactions among brothers, the activities and family concerns of a widowed matriarch, and more generally the role of women in such a family. We go behind the high walls surrounding the family compound, and see how the houses, gardens, and courtyards are constructed according to precise rules derived from religious and aesthetic beliefs, and how the layouts of the rooms are closely related to their occupants' status and role in the family. We learn the enormous importance to the Chinese of protocol, etiquette, and reciprocal obligation, and we learn also of Peking's pleasures—traveling in rickshaws, eating in restaurants, visiting parks. Above all, the book captures the essence of prewar Chinese cultural and social values in the busy life and strong, complex personality of the memorable Lao Tai-tai.

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