Early Life of Yuan Shikai and the Formation of Yuan Family

Author: Kachuen Yuan Gee, Lehman College CUNY

with Janey Sheau-Yueh Chao, Baruch College, CUNY

The authors submitted their first paper entitled “Genealogy Study of Yuan Shikai’s Family” (co-authored with Sheau-Yueh Chao) to the 4th International Conference of Institutes & Libraries for Chinese Overseas Studies in 2009. This present paper is a continuation that supplements the first study.

In the first paper, the authors traced the Yuan family’s ancestry, described Yuan Shikai’s own family, and provided biographical sketches of famous Yuan ancestors. In this present study, the authors focus on the following topics, which the first paper did not cover in detail:

- Introduction: Genealogy Record of the Yuan Clan (by Sheau-Yueh Chao)
- Early life of Yuan Shikai: His childhood and youth, focusing on his relationship with the Yuan elders.
- Yuan Shikai’s extended family: biographical sketches of his wives and children, including those not widely known.
- Genealogical chart of Yuan Shikai’s direct family, starting from the patriarch of the Yuan clan to the family’s contemporary descendents. (In Chinese)
Introduction: Genealogy Record of the Yuan Family  (by Sheau-yueh Chao)

According to the Genealogical Record of the Xiangcheng Yuan Family (Xiangcheng Yuan shi li dai pu xi zhi)\(^1\) and the Comprehensive History of the Clans (Tong zi shi zu lue 通志氏族略)\(^2\), the founder of the surname Yuan could be traced to the Emperor Shun (Di Shun 帝舜) who was one of the Five Emperors (Wu Di 五帝)\(^3\) in ancient China. Emperor Shun and his tribe were settled in Wei River (Wei Sui 嬀水) near Yongji 永濟, Shangxi 山西 Province. They adopted the river’s name Wei 嬀 as their surname. From Xia 夏, Shang 商 to the Zhou 周 Dynasties, the Wei family prospered and gradually moved to the upper gentry class. Emperor Zhou Wuwang 周武王 gave his daughter, the Imperial Princess Chang (Chang Gongzu 長公主) to marry Wei Man 嬀滿, who was a Feudal Prince (Daifu 大夫) of the State of Chen (Chen kuo 陳國).

Wei Man, officially entitled Duke Hu (Hu Gong 胡公), or Hu Gong Man 胡公滿, became the founder of Yuan family. Twelve generations after him, another ancestor Taotu 濤塗 (Xi 犀侯, Jingen 靖庚, Hun 愍, Fu 甫, Boshun 伯順, Tafu 他父, Zaibo 戴伯, Zhengshu 鄭叔, Jinfu 金父, Zhuangbo 莊伯, Boyuan 伯爰 Taotu 濤塗.) was honored by Duke Qi (Qi Huangong 齊桓公) because of his outstanding service to the Zhou Court. Taotu was bestowed in Yangxia 陽夏 (present Henan Taikang 河南太康). He adopted the style name (zi 字) Yuan 爰 from his family and called himself Yuan Taotu 爰濤塗. Since Yuan 爰 and Yuan 轅 were

---


\(^2\) Zheng, Qiao 鄭樵, 1104-1162. (Song 宋 Dynasty), (1934). “Tong zi shi zu lue 通志氏族略.” In Tong zhi lue 通志略, 52 juan. Shanghai: Shang wu yin shu guan.  

\(^3\) The Five Emperors were mythological rulers of China during the period from ca. 2852 B.C. to 2205 B.C., which is the time preceding the Xia 夏 Dynasty. According to the Records of the Grand Historian (Shiji 史記), they were: The Yellow Emperor (Huang Di 黃帝), Emperor Zhuanxu 顓頊, Emperor Ku (Di Ku 帝嚳), Emperor Yao (Di Yao 帝堯), and Emperor Shun (Di Shun 帝舜).
homonyms, his name could also be written as Yuan Taotu 軒濤塗. Thereafter the descendants adopted Yuan 軒 as their common surname. It was not until the Western Han (Xihan 西漢) Dynasty that the simplified character Yuan 袁 was adopted. The Yuan family settled primarily in Luoyang 洛陽, Henan 河南 Province.

According to Xing shi kao lue 姓氏考略⁴, the Yuan clan belonged to the family associations of Chen District (Chen jun 陳郡), Runan 汝南, and Pongcheng 彭城. As recorded by the Yuan He xing zuan 元何姓纂⁵, from the Han 漢 to the Northern and Southern Dynasties⁶, members of the Yuan family had grown to 28 persons, including three Dukes and 17 others of government officials. Throughout the Tang 唐, Song 宋, Yuan 元, Ming 明, and Qing 清 Dynasties, there were many prominent figures from the Yuan family, including the Prime Minister(Zaixiang 宰相) Yuan Zhihong 袁智弘 in Tang, historian Yuan Shu 袁樞 in Song, literary author Yuan Hongdao 袁宏道 and military commander Yuan Chonghuan 袁崇煥 in Ming, and well-known poet Yuan Mei 袁枚 and artist Yuan Jiang 袁江 in Qing. However, it was not until Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 became the first president of the Republic of China that the Yuan family finally reached the highest prominence.

The family name Yuan has been ranked as the 37th largest Chinese surnames with a total population of approximately 620,000 in China⁷. The families settled primarily in the provinces of Henan 河南, Sichuan 四川, Hunan 湖南, and Hebei 河北. Among them, Henan claims to have the largest Yuan population, about 10.6% of the total.

---


⁶ The Northern and Southern Dynasties (Nanbei Chao 南北朝) covers the Feudal States (guo 國) of Wei 魏, Jin 晉, Liang 梁 and Chen 陳.

Before ending this brief account of the Yuan genealogy, the author must mention briefly two very important historical relics in the family’s history, the Iron Plate Genealogy Chart of the Yuan Clan; and the Yuan Chapel Tablet

**Yuan Shi Tie Pai Jiapu 袁氏鐵牌家譜 (Iron Plate Genealogy Chart of The Yuan Clan)**

No documentation can be found for the early Yuan family history. The first identified source was a genealogical chart on an iron plate called Yuan Shi Tie Pai Jiapu 袁氏鐵牌家譜 which was compiled in late Qing Dynasty of the Tongzhi 同治 (r. A. D. 1861-1874) 13th year in 1874 by Yuan Baozhong 袁保中 and Yuan Baohuan 袁保桓. The genealogical chart of Yuan family tree was engraved on an iron plate of 90 millimeter high, 280 millimeter wide and half millimeter thick in rectangular shape. The family tree consists of 231 male members. The plate was hanged on the wall of the Yuan ancestral hall in the Yuan Compound at Yuan Ge 袁閣 in Xiangcheng, Henan.9 During the Chinese Cultural Revolution, in the Big Iron Extracting Period of Da Lien Gang 大煉鋼 in 1958, the Communists demanded all useful irons and metals be burned and extracted to make military weapons. Fortunately, Yuan Jiajun 袁家俊, a 15th generation descendant, secretly made ink rubbings of the plate on cotton papers before it was destroyed. Many years later, he passed the document to his nephew for safe keeping. Without his effort, the genealogical record could not be preserved until today10.

---

8 Yuan, Baozong 袁保中 and Baohuan Yuan 袁保桓 (1874). Yuan shi tie pai jia pu 袁氏鐵牌家譜. Genealogical chart of the Yuan family on an iron plate.


10 Ibid.
In traditional Chinese society, generation names were assigned by the ancestor of a clan in a specific order. Each generation was given a character which generally taken from a propitious verse with rhymes. It is usually one of the characters in a two-character given name, which is referred to as a generation name.  

While genealogical ranks for the first seven generations cannot be traced, Yuan Shi Tie Pai Jiapu 袁氏鐵牌家譜 lists the generational orders from the 8th “zhi” to 48th “yi” generations. Additional forty characters are added to the revision in Yuan shi zongpu 袁氏宗譜 which completes the total of 88th generations for the Yuan clan. Here’s the complete list:

Zhi Jeou Yao San 志九耀三,
Bao Shi Ke Jia 保世克家,
Qi Wen Shao Wu 啟文紹武,
Wei Wei Guo Hua 威衛國華.
Ling De Shou Kao 令德壽考,
Sheng Chi Jia Fa 綱池嘉伐.


12 Ibid, Yuan, Baozong 袁保中 and Baohuan Yuan 袁保桓 (1874).

Ru Gang Ji Zhao 茹綱紀兆，
Er Dong Liang Kuan 鄒懂梁寛，
Cheng Zhao Lieh Ji 承昭列記，
Zhu Cheng Xiang Yi 祖呈祥儀。

Ji Xian Yang Shan 繼賢揚善，
Yen Xu Tian Chang 延續天昌。
Han Mo Heng Guei 翰墨恒貴，
Tong Rui Zi Chang 通睿智強。
Zi Yen Kai Ding 紫硯開鼎，
Ren Ci Lun Chang 仁慈倫常。
Hui Cheng Fan Xio 英成番秀，
Du Xin Yu Zhang 篤信裕彰。
Zun Wang Yui Tai 尊望悅泰，
Ying Zou Yong Kang 英胄永康。

The following list identifies Yuan Shikai’s ancestral line from the first generation of Yuan Ciheng 袁持衡 to the 13th generation of Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 14.

1st  Yuan Ciheng 袁持衡
2nd  Yuan Yingju 袁膺舉
3rd  Yuan Buyue 袁步月
4th  Yuan Xueshi 袁學詩
5th  Yuan Tier 袁体二
6th  Yuan Fangba 袁方芭
7th  Yuan Lichuan 袁理全
8th  Yuan Zhigong 袁志恭
9th  Yuan Jeouzhi 袁九芝
10th Yuan Yaodong 袁耀東
11th Yuan Shusan 袁樹三
12th Yuan Baozhong 袁保中
13th Yuan Shikai 袁世凱

From the 13th “shi 世” to 17th “wen 文” generations which includes descendants of all the six sons, Shitong 世彤, Shifu 世輔, Shikai 世凱, Shilian 世廉, Shidun 世敦, and Shichang 世昌, these four generations of the family have produced approximately one thousand members.

The Yuan Family Chapel Yuan Shi Jia Miao Bei 袁氏家廟碑

The Yuan Family Chapel was established in 1910 during the period of Emperor Xuantong 宣統 by Duke Wencheng (Wencheng Gong 文誠公) and other Yuan elders. It was used as a common gathering place for the Yuan descendants to commemorate the prominent members in the family. The stone tablet called Yuan Shi Jia Miao Bei 袁氏家廟碑 was erected in the Chapel. It accounted the history and development of the clan regarding the migration of Yuan ancestors in the early Ming Dynasty from western to northern China and the settlement of Yuan descendants in the Yuan compound at Yuan Ge. During the Cultural Revolution when the family’s genealogical chart on iron plate was destroyed, the stone tablet remained intact. It is now a permanent historical relic of the Xiangcheng Museum in Henan.

Figure 2. Yuan Shi Jia Miao Bei 袁氏家廟碑

Part I. Early Life of Yuan Shikai

Yuan Shikai was born on September 16th, 1859 (Chinese calendar August 20th in the reign of Qing 清 Dynasty Emperor Xian Feng 咸丰). It was a happy and exciting day for the Yuan clan at Xiangcheng. On that day, they received a double blessing: head of the family Jiasan 甲三 won a great victory over the Nian 捻 rebels in Anhui 安徽; and a robust baby boy was born
to Jiasan’s nephew Baozhong 保中 at home. To commemorate this special occasion, matriarch Guoshi named the baby Shi 世 (generation rank) kai 凯 (triumphant return); the style name of the newborn was Weiting 慰庭 (consolation to the family).

The birthplace of Shikai was uncertain. Traditionally, some records of the clan claimed that he was born in Yuan Zhai, but according to Yuan authority Luo Baoshan 骆宝善 and Rong An Di Zi Ji 容庵弟子记 (Collection of Historical Documents about Yuan Shikai) 15, Shikai was born in Yuan Zhangying 袁张营 village, and later moved to Yuan Zhai. In any case, there was no doubt that Shikai spent his early childhood years in Yuan Zhai. Shortly after his birth, Shikai was given to Baozhong’s younger brother Baoqing to raise, because the latter’s wife had just lost her infant son. Baoqing had no male children; he and his wife Niu Shi 牛氏 loved Shikai as their own, even though the boy was a handful of troubles. Shikai was formally adopted by the couple when he was five.

As a young child, Shikai was very different from the diligent, well-behaved, and deferential Yuan sons. Although very intelligent, he did not apply his talents to books. Instead of studying the Confucian classics, he preferred to play outside the house: climbing up on roofs and trees to catch birds and insects, playing tricks on neighbors, and bullying his young cousins. A well-known story tells that when Shikai was four years old, the Nian rebels assaulted Yuan Zhai. The servants took Shikai up the fortress walls to watch the battle; and instead of being frightened, he actually enjoyed the “show” 16. His tutors could not discipline him but often fell victim to his practical jokes (such as to scare his teacher, he hid in the dark, wailed like a ghost and shook jars of fire-flies to make “ghost flashes” 17.

Fortunately, this mischievous and untamed boy had three much respected and feared heads of the family to govern over him, namely his adopted father Yuan Baoqing, 袁保庆 and his uncles, Yuan Baoheng 袁保恒, and Yuan Baoling 袁保龄. These elders recognized that the boy, although very naughty and had little interest in books, was actually very intelligent and a born leader. Hence, they did their best to guide him in the traditional way – study hard to become

---

15 Shen Zuxian, Wu Kaisheng, comp 沈祖宪, 吴闓生 编 (1913). Yong An Di Zi Ji, 容庵弟子记 (Collection of Yong An Students) leaf 1.
16 Ibid
a scholar, win a title in the keju, and eventually develop a future in officialdom. Although Shikai did not exactly follow the career path prescribed by his elders, their teaching influenced him deeply and helped to shape his character and career.

**Yuan Baoqing 袁保庆(1825-1873)**

The first authoritative figure in Shikai life was Yuan Baoqing, Shikai’s adopted father. Born in Xiangcheng in 1825, he was the second son of Shushan. Since his childhood, Baoqing was taught by his uncle Jiasan under very strict discipline and supervision. Like Jiasan, he was quiet, industrious, and practical, a good student of the philosophy Li Xue.在1858, Baoqing passed the civil service examination, *ke ju*, 科举 winning the secondary title of *ju ren* 举人. Next year, in 1859, Yuan Shikai was born to his cousin Baozhong. Because Baoqing had no male children, he adopted Shikai as his son.

After joining the army and winning many battles against the Nian rebels, Baoqing was eventually promoted in 1866 to the office of zhifu 知府 (prefect of a prefecture) of Jinan 济南 in Shandong 山东 province. Although Shikai was only seven at that time, Baoqing did not feel safe leaving him at home. He brought Shikai along to his new post so he could supervise his son himself. Following the tradition of the Yuan family, he wanted Shikai to study classics in preparation for the *ke ju* examination. He hired additional tutors to teach the boy, and although he was extremely busy with official duties, he was never lax in checking Shikai’s progress. Under his supervision, Shikai, while enjoying the joyful life of a young lord, did manage to learn the basics of classics quite well. Also, under his father’s strict house rules, Shikai had to restrain his naughtiness and became more disciplined. He was much more mature than an average seven year old. His tutor, a well-known scholar named Wang Zhiqing 王志清, frequently took him to visit the famous sites around Jinan. Once, when they visited the memorial chapel of a martyred official from the Ming Dynasty, Wang told Shikai the story of this general who refused to surrender to the emperor’s enemies and suffered a horrible death as a result in the Jingnan insurrection 靖难之变. Shikai, though only seven, was deeply moved. He lamented and wept openly at the tragic fate of this heroic figure. When Wang took Shikai to the theater to entertain him, the boy loved to see plays about loyalty and filial piety. Unlike other children, he
was not at all interested in the silly and superstitious plays about gods and monsters. This unusual interest so impressed Wang that he believed Shikai was a boy of great promise.\(^\text{18}\)

In 1868, when Shikai was nine, he began another new and exciting life when Baoqing was promoted to the post of Jiangnan Yan Fa Dao (Salt Control Circuit) in Nanjing. He was responsible for training and commanding the Hui army and navy in Nanjing, repairing the river dyke, and supervising the traffic of salt commerce. Baoqing worked very hard at these three difficult tasks that required his full attention day and night, because Nanjing was not only strategically critical to the Hui army, but also was Qing government’s financial center in the south, controlling the salt traffic and commercial taxes. Although he brought Shikai with him to Nanjing, Baoqing now had very limited time to supervise the boy himself. Shikai seized this rare opportunity of freedom and spent five happy years in the thriving city.

As he was getting older, his life style also began to change. On one hand, he still enjoyed the carefree life of a rich playboy. No longer playing childish games, he now enjoyed horseback riding, martial arts, chess games, and even ventured into drinking, gambling, and patronizing pleasure houses. The reason many historians called him a rouge was because of these vice hobbies that he developed in his adolescent years.\(^\text{19}\) Yet, on the other hand, with the coming of age, the serious side of his character also began to emerge. Filial piety was a characteristic that he kept all his life. His adopted parents, Baoqing and Niu Shi, loved him as their own son. In return, Shikai was very devoted to them and respected them just as they were his natural parents. Yet, he did not neglect his natural parents, Baozhong and Liu Shi. All his life, Shikai was their obedient and loyal son, although he spent much less time with them than with his adopted father and uncles.

According to family tradition, Yuan sons must study the classics industriously in order to enter the *ke ju* examination. However, ever since he was a small child, Shikai was not a good student of literature and did not excel in his studies like his elders. Instead of reading Confucius, he preferred to study books about military campaigns and strategies. Nevertheless, he still studied classics with private tutors under the strict supervision of Baoqing, and learnt the basic

\(^{18}\) Wang, Zhonghe 王忠和(2007)*Xiangcheng Yuan Shi Jia Zhuan* 项城袁氏家伝 (History of the Yuan Family of Xiangcheng). p. 033

\(^{19}\) Zhang, p. 37.
skills of writing the “eight parts” essays and to compose poems. But this weakness in literary studies did not mean that he was not ambitious. The writings of his youth, though not polished and refined, reflected his ambition and some of his high goals. For example, when he was 11, he wrote these sentences in an essay: “I am going to make all people in the world to bow to my palace, anyone who dares to disobey [my order] will be executed without mercy!” 20 When he was 12, in one of his poems, he said: “I want to open my huge mouth to heaven, and swallow the barbarians all at once”; 21 and at 15, he wrote: “the river surges eastwards without stopping; my heart was saddened, when will relief come? I am just waiting for my feathers to be full grown; then I shall fly over the highest heavens to rescue the suffering souls.” 22

As an important court official for many years, Baoqing was very experienced dealing with the ups and downs of Qing’s officialdom. Since he realized that Shikai was very sharp and wise in his dealings with people even at a very young age, he believed that his adopted son would be a successful official when he grew up. Consequently, he taught Shikai many “tactics” of being a slick, clever, but also capable official. When Shikai was older, Baoqing shared his court experiences with him and taught him the basic protocols. In the Nanjing office, Shikai frequently acted as Baoqing’s “junior” assistant.

His health weakened by overwork, Baoqing died of cholera in 1874 when Shikai was fifteen. Although he could not watch his adopted son grow up, his guardianship helped to change Shikai from a mischievous and wild country boy to a capable young man with political and military aspirations. His coaching proved to be extremely helpful to Shikai’s political career. Learning from his adopted father’s experiences, Shikai eventually became the shrewd bureaucrat known as “a politician who could gain from the left and from the right” 23. In keeping with the Yuan family tradition, Baoqing also tried to instill the virtue of “loyalty to your emperor and country” into the young man. Although in the developments of his career, Shikai might have failed to match his elders in their loyalty and dedication to the Qing emperors, he was nevertheless still influenced by their teachings.

20 Wang, p. 37 (translated by author)
21 Ibid (translated by author)
22 Ibid (translated by author)
23 Wang, p. 25
After Baoqing’s death, Shikai had to leave Nanjing and returned to Henan for a long period of mourning. He spent over a year of idle and boring days until Baoheng took him back to Beijing. From that time on, Yuan Baoheng 袁保恒 (1826-1878) and Yuan Baoling, 袁保龄 (1841-1890 Shikai’s two uncles, became the dominant and central figures of his young life.

**Yuan Baoheng 袁保恒**

Born in 1826 in Xiangcheng, Baoheng (style name Xiaowu 小午) was the eldest son of Jiasan. Like his father, he excelled not only in Confucian classics but was also a brave soldier. He won the title *ju ren* when he was 21, and then the honorable title *jin shih* 进士 four years later. After serving as Hanglin Yuan bian siu 翰林院编修 (an editor in the Hanlin Yuan Academy) for a year, Jiasan asked him to join the local militia in Anhui as his assistant in 1855. Baoheng fought bravely against the Nians for about a decade and won many victories. After Jiasan’s death in 1863, Baoheng continued to serve in the military, first under Li Hongzhang 李鸿章 to suppress the Nians, and later joined Zuo Zongtang’s 左宗棠 western campaigns against the Moslem minorities. Because of his merits, he was promoted to several second highest-ranking official positions, including Hu Bu Shilang 户部侍郎 (Vice Director of the Bureau of Revenue), Nei Ge Xue Shi 内阁学士 (Academician of the Grand Secretariat), Li Bu Shilang 吏部侍郎 (Vice Director of the Bureau of Personnel), and Xing Bu Shilang 刑部侍郎 (Vice Director of the Ministry of Justice).

In 1874, Baoheng went home to Xiangcheng for a visit and met Shikai who was home mourning the death of Baoqing. He was impressed by Shikai’s personable manners and sharp intelligence, but he was also very concerned that the young man was wasting his time in Xiangcheng. After consultation with his elders, he brought Shikai back with him to Beijing. He asked Shikai to assist him to take care of various miscellaneous affairs in his office, and appointed his brother Baoling to be Shikai’s classics tutor. Since Shikai already learned the protocols of Qing officialdom from his Nanjing days, he quickly became Baoheng’s capable assistant. In the meantime, Baoling was responsible for teaching the young man scholarly studies. Keeping with the Yuan family tradition, he firmly believed that Shikai must study studiously in order to pass the *ke ju*. He hired three tutors to tutor Shikai, one for composition, one for poetry,
and one for calligraphy. All three subjects were requisites to pass the *ke ju* examinations. Shikai, however, did not like the classics; especially he detested to write the “eight part essays” 八股文.

In 1876, Shikai was finally allowed to go home to Henan to participate for the first time in the entry level *ke ju* examination at Henan’s capital Chenzhou 陈州 (now Huaiyang 淮阳). However, fortune did not smile at him although he did quite well in the examination. The education commissioner of Henan at that time, Ju Hongji 瞿鸿机, was offended by the magistrate of Chenzhou because the latter only paid him a small amount of “courtesy money” (bribes offered to the Commissioner); to retaliate, Ju tossed out all of the top ranking candidates of the exam, including Shikai.24 Shikai was furious when he found out what Ju did, and the two men became political enemies for life.

Although he failed the keju, his uncles in Beijing would not allow him to go back to the capital. They ordered him to remain in Henan to wait for the next examination. Frustrated and disappointed, Shikai indulged himself in his old hobbies of gambling and drinking. He owed debts to many people and spent almost all of his inheritance from Baoqing in lavish living. Alarmed by his behavior, the uncles in Beijing decided that in order to restrain him and to keep him away from bad company, they should find him a wife. Although Shikai was only seventeen, he was considered old enough to marry according to the Chinese custom. By the end of 1876, Shikai was married to Yu Shi, daughter of a wealthy landowner in Chenzhou.

Shikai returned to Beijing the second year after his marriage. At that time, Baoheng was promoted to the position of vice director in the Ministry of Justice. Although he was extremely busy, he still kept Shikai under his wing and gave him advise. He often told Shikai:” You have too many concerns about the details of a problem…if you were so indecisive, you might not be able to seize an opportunity at the right moment and make a quick decision ”. 25 His warning affected Shikai deeply. In his later life, Shikai was determined and resolute in many of his decisions, whether they were right or wrong.

In 1877, Baoheng went back to Xiangcheng to attend the funeral of his grandmother Gaoshi. A devastating drought struck Henan at that time. Thousands of peasants died of hunger.

---

24 Wang. *p.39*
but relief from the government was most inadequate. Baoheng donated money, set up soup kitchens, and supervised relief operations himself. Unfortunately, he caught cholera like Baoqing and died at a relief shelter in 1878. The peasants in Henan deeply mourned his passing and set up a memorial chapel in his honor. After the death of Baoheng, only his brother Baoling remained in court. He had to take over the relief work left unfinished by Baoheng as well as the guardianship of Shikai.

**Yuan Baolin 袁保龄**

Born in 1841 in Xiangcheng, Baoling was the second son of Jiasan, stepbrother of Baoheng. He followed the same career path of the other Yuan sons: first passed the *ke ju* and won the title *ju ren*, then joined Jiasan’s militia to fight the rebels. Under Baoling’s leadership, Jiasan’s forces managed to stop the northern advances of the Nians. After the death of Jiasan, the Qing Court promoted Baoling to *Nei Ge Zhong Shu* 内阁中书 (secretary in the Grand Secretariat), and later to *Nei Ge Zhong Shu Shi Lang* 内阁中书侍郎 (copyreader who examined and edited all documents issued from the palace). In 1881, Li Hongzhang, commander of Qing’s Navy, the *Bei Yang Lan Dui* 北洋舰队 (North Ocean Fleet), heard that Baoling was a hardworking, responsible and capable official. Since Li needed someone to direct the Fleet in the north, he asked the Court to transfer Baoling to Tianjin 天津. Baoling did well in his new post. He was a strict but upright and fair leader, and managed to maintain good relations with the common folks.

In 1882 Baoling was sent to Manchuria to head the project of building a dyke at Lu Shun 旅顺 in the Liao Dong 辽东 Peninsular near Korea, and also to fortify defense mechanism along the coastlines of Huang Hai 黄海 (Yellow Sea). In freezing weather, facing fierce snowstorms, Baoling worked with the builders day and night and built the dike in forty days. To strengthen coastline defense, he built fortifications, each equipped with cannons, and set up telegraph communication between Tianjin and Lu Shun for emergency communication. At that time, France wanted to take over Lu Shun, but because of the military fortifications built by Baoling, they did not dare to attack. In the meantime, Baoling also perceived that Japan wanted to invade Korea, a weak country that could not defend itself. He sent his young nephew, Shikai, to Korea to help the Korean monarchy, while he himself quickly added more cannons and troops at Lu
Shun, fortifying it to be a solid and strong military base. To further develop Lu Shun, he encouraged the local people to grow mulberry trees on the seashore, taught them the skills of weaving, set up schools for children and trained local militia soldiers. His work was highly praised by the Qing government and he was regarded as one of the best commanders of coastal defense.

After Baoheng’s death and Baoling’s transfer to the north, Shikai had more free time to study books on military sciences. His interest and ambition to forge a career in the military were strong; but, keeping with the family tradition, he still hoped to win a title in the ke ju. Unfortunately, he again failed the examination in 1879. Frustrated and outraged, he burnt all the essays and poems that he had written, and declared: “a real man should devote his life to fighting in the battle field, to keep stability and peace within one’s country and to fend off foreign invasions from outside. [A real man] should never waste his time with pens and ink stones!”

Thus, he abandoned forever the idea of passing the ke ju, and vowed to do away with the system if and when he had the power to do so. He eventually fulfilled this goal twenty-seven years later. In 1906, Empress Cixi accepted his policies of education reform. ke ju was finally abolished after controlling the future and fate of Chinese intellectuals for almost two thousand years.

Further breaking from the family tradition, Shikai did not believe that studying classics was the only way to secure a career in the Qing court. At that time, the Qing government needed funds to pay various indemnities, and official positions were frequently sold to common people as a means of collecting money. Shikai chose to take this quicker and easier path. In 1880, shortly after he failed the ke ju, Shikai decided to try his luck in Beijing by purchasing an official position there. At that time, he had very limited means because he had already spent most of the fortune inherited from Baoqing. Moreover, his decision to give up ke ju earned him ridicule and mockery from his relatives. They regarded him as a useless young man with no future. When he tried to borrow money from his wealthy in-laws, they told him that he would do better if he stayed at home. Having no other alternatives, his widowed natural and adopted mothers had to give all of their savings to him to finance the trip.

---

26 Shen Zuxian 沈祖宪. v.1, leaf 4.
The trip to the capital turned out to be a disaster. The Yuan elders were no longer in Beijing to guide him. Baoheng had passed away, and Baoling was transferred to Lu Shun to supervise coastal defense. Without his guardians and mentors, young Shikai soon fell into bad company. Very quickly, he lost all his money in gambling. Instead of purchasing a position, he was stranded in Beijing. Fortunately, some of the colleagues of the Yuan elders were still in the capital. They rescued him from destitution and lent him money to go back to Henan. This bad experience taught Shikai an unforgettable lesson. He hated gambling ever since and never touched the games again. He also forbade his family to gamble, although most of his sons did not abide to his rule.

Upon returning to Henan, Shikai did not want to stay in that backward province but still wanted to look for other ways to enter officialdom. He first went to seek help from Baoqing’s old friend Zhou Fu 周馥, who purchased a fifth rank official position for him and also referred him to one of the most powerful ministers at that time, Bei Yang Da Chen 北洋大臣 (minister of the North Ocean) Li Hongzhang 李鸿章. Shikai, however, was intimidated by the power and fame of Li. Although he did gain an interview with Li, when the latter did not show signs of welcome or appreciation, he quickly withdrew. Not knowing what to do next, Shikai wandered to Shanghai and spent his days in pleasure houses. Eventually, with the help of a courtesan, he left Shanghai for Shandong to join the Brigade of Baoqing’s old friend Wu Changqing 吴常庆, whom he met in Nanjing at Baoqing’s funeral.

Wu was impressed by Shikai’s capabilities, but he still believed that Shikai should study the books and obtain an official position through the ke ju. He selected his top aide, prominent scholar Zhang Jian 张謇, to be Shikai’s mentor. By then, Shikai had lost all interest in books. He only wished to serve in Wu’s brigade. Although Zhang was disappointed in Shikai’s literary studies, he appreciated Shikai’s loyalty to the court and his dedication to defend the country. Because of Zhang’s recommendation, Wu finally allowed Shikai to join his brigade as an officer in charge of managing miscellaneous affairs of the camp. Very quickly, Shikai’s abilities were recognized, especially after he crushed a riot of soldiers by executing the gang leaders immediately. Wu, instead of blaming Shikai for carrying out the execution without his order, realized that the young officer was resolute and able to take quick and decisive actions in a crisis.
These were the good qualities of a soldier. Therefore, when he was called to Korea by the Qing Court to suppress a palace insurrection, Wu decided to take Shikai with him.

Originally, Shikai was unwilling to venture to such a strange and distant country, but his remaining uncle Baoling encouraged him to go. Although he could no longer pressure Shikai to continue the _ke ju_ path, Baoling nevertheless was still very concerned about his nephew’s future. Because of his own success with the Northern Fleet, he realized that the military could be another outlet for Shikai’ to develop his career. While he was at Lu Shun building up coastal defense, he continued to send Shikai advises and strategies to deal with the crisis in Korea. Because of Baoling’s encouragement and guidance, the Korean mission turned out to be a successful milestone in Shikai’s life that opened the door to his prominent military career.
Part II. Extended Family

Rise to Prominence

Shikai spent 12 years in Korea, from 1882 to 1894. In this long sojourn, he successfully suppressed two palace insurrections, rescued and restored the Korean royal house, and served as the court appointed “Imperial Resident Of Seoul”, responsible for diplomatic negotiations about Korean affairs with Japan and Russia. Japan deeply resented Shikai’s presence there and bitterly protested this act of “aggression” against Korean sovereignty. Although Li Hongzhang tried his best avoid a confrontation, tensions between the countries continued to mount until a war finally broke out in 1894. The First Sino-Japanese war 甲午战争 ended in the utter defeat of Qing. The new Baiyang Fleet (Baiyang Jiandui 北洋舰队), established by Li, was destroyed. Qing government had to plead for peace settlement, and finally Li was forced to sign the humiliating and unequal Treaty of Maguan (Maaguan Tiaoyue 马关条约), which, among other things, recognized the complete independence and autonomy of Korea. China’s sovereignty in Korea thus came to an end. Shikai was recalled to China at the beginning of the war, narrowly escaping arrest.

Although Shikai lost his position in Korea, the mission actually was his stepping-stone to high officialdom. His talents in military commandership and his daring courage in suppressing the insurrections were well recognized by Li and the Qing Court. After Shikai returned to China, Li, fallen in disgrace because of the Korean defeat, recommended Shikai to be the commander of the modernized New Army.

Established in 1895, the New Army, Xin Jung (新军), was the first modernized army in China trained with modern western weaponry. Shikai set up strict, fair, and clear disciplinary rules for the soldiers to follow27, and managed to develop a personal and loyal relationship with officers and soldiers. The New Army, well trained, well organized, and equipped with top-notch western weapons, soon became very strong and efficient. Politically, it also became the base of Shikai’s strength and power in the Qing government. Because of his military power, Shikai rose

27 In his “Hymn of Advisement to Soldiers”, Shikai urged the soldiers to be patriotic and loyal, faithful to the Emperor and to the Qing Government. He promised rewards for obedience and bravery, but also stressed that those who broke the rules or lapsed in duties would be punished or even executed. This hymn, written on a scroll, is now hanging in the Xiangchang Museum. (Wang, p.56)
rapidly to high government. After supporting the Dowager Empress Cixi 慈禧 against Emperor Guangxu 光绪 in the 1898 coup d’état, he was quickly promoted to be the Governor of Shangdong. Then, because of his success in suppressing the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, he was granted the position of Viceroy of Zhili (Zhili Zongdu 直隶总督, also the Commissioner for North Ocean Trade (Beiyang Tongshang Dachen 北洋通商大臣) in 1901. Strengthened by foreign financial support and technological help, Shikai’s army, now known as the Beiyang Army, became the most powerful army in China. Backed by this formidable force, Shikai soon became one of the powerful ministers in the Junqi Chu 军机处 (Council of State), and was also granted the title of Taizishaobao 太子少保 (Junior Guardian of the Heir Apparent), a title he enjoyed very much. His career suffered a setback when he was dismissed and sent home by the Qing Court in 1898, after his protector Cixi died. He stayed out of the spot light for almost three years in Zhang De 彰德 and waited for the opportunity of a comeback. When the revolution led by Sun Yatsen broke out in 1911, the Qing Court had to call him back to deal with the rebels. Realizing that the days of Qing Dynasty were numbered, Shikai used his military power and negotiated the abdication of Qing’s last emperor Puyi 溥仪 in 1911, ending the dynasty’s rule of two hundred and fifty years peacefully without invoking a civil war. In 1912, Shikai became the first president of the Republic of China, the only leader with sufficient military power to control the chaotic situation in the country. Thus, although he failed the keju and did not follow the traditional career path prescribed by his elders, Shikai still fulfilled his ambition to become the ultimate leader of China by military might.

**Formation of the Yuan Family**

As one might have expected, the success of Shikai’s career inevitably changed the formation of his family. From 1876, when he married Yushi, to his death in 1916, the Yuan family had expanded to include one legitimate first wife and nine concubines, seventeen sons and fifteen daughters. Such a large family might seem amazing in modern times, it was not so uncommon in old China. Although polygamy is illegal in most societies now, in 19th century China it was not only a condoned social norm but also a symbol of man’s status and wealth. Concubines were considered as additional ornaments to a wealthy man’s life. They were bought either because of their beauty and youth, or because the first wife could not bear enough sons.
Many concubines were beautiful courtesans and therefore expensive to procure. Other more ordinary ones still require their masters to support them. Hence, the more concubines a man had, the wealthier he appeared to be. In Qing dynasty, from high ranked court officials to rich merchants, almost every man had a wife and several concubines.

This decadent social system no doubt encouraged Shkai to indulge in his pleasure hunting. Although he did establish schools for girls as one of his education reforms, he still believed that acquiring concubines would enhance his position and wealth. Although information about his wife and concubines was not recorded in official Yuan genealogy, many interesting facts could be found in popular stories about the family.  

*Wife and Concubines*

*Wife  Yushi 于氏*

Shikai married Yushi, daughter of a wealthy landlord, when he was seventeen. They enjoyed a few years of marital bliss, but then became estranged because of a miscarried joke. Once, Shikai teased Yushi for dressing like a low class courtesan, Yushi was insulted and retorted: “I am not a low class woman like those concubines in your family, I am a lady who married you properly in a sedan chair!” Shikai was deeply offended because his natural mother was a concubine.

The couple never really reconciled after this incident. Years later, when Shikai rose to be the President of the Republic of China, Yushi’s old fashioned attitude of priority caused her husband embarrassment and inconvenience. For instance, she was not accustomed to meet or talk to men who were not her family members. In diplomatic functions, when it became necessary for Shikai to introduce his wife, Yushi was extremely shy and even became frightened when male diplomats approached her. Eventually, she became Shikai’s wife in name only. In official functions, Shikai’s first concubine Shanshi 沈氏, was his constant consort. Nevertheless, Yushi remained as the matriarch of Shikai’s family. Her son, Keding 克定, the eldest of the Yuan sons, was regarded as the “heir apparent ”of Shikai.

---

28 Stories about the Yuan family were taken from books, documents, and personal interviews (see bibliography)
29 Wang, p. 040.
Concubines

1st concubine Shenshi 沈氏

Shikai met Shenshi when she was a popular courtesan in Shanghai. Failing to ask Li Hongzhang for a position, he was stranded in that big city with nothing better to do. He spent most of his time in pleasure houses and met Shenshi by chance. Because of her experiences with men, Shan realized that Shikai was not a common playboy, but a young man with ambition and great potentials. She encouraged him not to give up his ambition, and urged him to explore a career in the military. Since Shikai was out of money, she lent him enough funds for him to go to Shandong to join the army of Wu Changqing. In 1882, when Shikai was appointed as the court minister in Korea, he sent for Shen and the two were reunited. Shikai never brought his legitimate wife Yushi to Korea, but regarded Shen as his first wife. She was not only one of the two concubines most favored by Shikai, but also acted as his official consort. In diplomatic functions, she was Shikai’s partner who charmed many foreign officials. Unfortunately, because of ill health, she could not bear children. As a consolation, Shikai let her adopt his second son Kewan, the talented young poet and painter.

Korean Concubines: 2d: Wushi 吳氏, 3d: Jinshi 金氏, 4th: Minshi 闵氏

During Shikai’s twelve years of tenure in Korea, three Korean concubines were added to his household. They were, in a way, a reward from the Korean royal house for his help in suppressing the insurrections. Among them, Jinshi was the daughter of Korean nobility. She married Shikai believing that she was to be the first wife. Besides her, she also brought along two attendants, Wu and Min. After the wedding, however, Jin discovered that she was only a concubine, and a third one as to that. One of her attendants, Wu, who was older than her, became the 2d. Her other attendant, Min, became the 4th. According to family legends, these three Korean women were abused and even beaten by the Chinese wives, especially by Shenshi. Although they were discriminated, home sick, and unhappy, they still bore Shikai many children. Jinshi had two sons: Kewen 克文 (2d son), and Keliang 克良 (3d son); and 3 daughters, Shuzhen, 叔祯 (3rd daughter), 8th daughter (died in infancy) and Sizhen 思祯 (10th daughter). Wu shi had four sons, Kequan 克权 (5th son), Keqi,克齐 (7th son), Kejian 克坚 (10th son), Kedu 克度 (12th son); and 2 daughters, Bozhen 伯祯 (1st daughter) and Luzhen 禄祯 (6th daughter). Minshi had 1
son, Keduan 克端 (4th son); and 3 daughters, Zhongzhen 仲桢 (2d daughter), 4th daughter (died in infancy), and Fuzhen 复祯 (7th daughter).

5th concubine Yangshi 杨氏

Next to Shenshi, Shikai’s most favorite concubine was Yangshi. Unlike Shen, she was not a courtesan but the daughter of a small businessman from a relatively well off family. Although petite and not particularly pretty, she was nevertheless very clever, especially in financial matters. Also, she was very personable and knew how to please her husband. Shikai trusted her completely and appointed her as the “housekeeper” of the family. Besides taking care of Shikai’s daily life, she was in charge of the family budget, from daily expenditures to allowances of concubines and servants wages. In the family, she was feared and respected by all. Yangshi had four sons: Kehuan 克桓 (6th son), Kezhen,克轸 (8th son), Kejiu,克九 (9th son), and Kean 克安 (11th son); and 2 daughters: Jizhen,季祯 (5th daughter) and 15th daughter (died in infancy).

6th concubine Yehshi 叶氏

According to family legend, Yehshi was a beautiful courtesan from Nanjing. Originally she was Shikai’s second son Kewan’s favorite companion. However, when Shikai saw her picture accidentally, he was attracted by her beauty and Kewan was forced to give her up. Yeh bore Shikai two sons: Kejie 克捷 (14th son) and Keyou 克有 (17th son); and 3 daughters: Fuzhen 福祯 (9th daughter), Qizhen 琪祯 (11th daughter), and Ruizhen 瑞祯 (12th daughter).

7th concubine Zhangshi 张氏, 8th concubine Guoshi 郭氏, 9th concubine Liushi 刘氏

Information about the remaining three concubines was scarce, except that Zhangshi died very young and bore no children. Guoshi was another beautiful courtesan who was bought by 1st concubine Shen shi and her adopted son Kewan as a gift to please Shikai, when the latter was dismissed and sent home by the Qing Court in 1908. Liushi originally was the maid of 5th concubine Yangshi. Guoshi bore two sons: Kexiang 克相 (13rd son), Kehe 克和 (15th son) and 1 daughter Guzhen 怨祯 (14th daughter). Liushi bore one son Kefang 克藩 (16th son); and one daughter Yizhen 仪祯 (13rd daughter).

Family Life in a Regal Household
Although Shikai’s household was very large, it was well organized and in good order. Where ever his residence was, be it the Yangshoyuan 养寿园 in Zhangde, Xiaobailou 小白楼 in Tianjin, or Zhongnnanhai 中南海 in Beijing, Shikai always divided his mansions into separate units, with each concubine and her entourage occupying one individual unit. His own quarters would be in the center of the house. Adult children and their families also had their own separate quarters. Everyone lived in his/her own territory without interfering with the other. Furthermore, the household was governed by very strict rules of protocol laid down by Shikai, Shen shi and Yangshi. The concubines must answer to either Shenshi or Yangshi, and must request for permission for anything they wished to do. Yang was particularly powerful because she was not only Shikai’s favorite, but also the “house keeper” and the “treasurer”. Shikai himself rarely paid attention to the management of his wives.

As to the children, Shikai was very strict with his sons. He trained them according to the old family tradition of Baoqing. Every morning, they must all go to his rooms to show respect, and report to him the progress of their studies and their other daily activities. The sons who were going abroad to study would be scrutinized more than those staying at home. Often, when Shikai was in a good mood and not busy, he might ask them to join him for breakfast or lunch. His sons often found such a ritual intimidating and annoying, but they dared not disobey. If Shikai lost his temper, he might whip them even when they were adults.  

Shikai was less strict and more loving to his daughters. They were not required to perform the morning ritual, and they were not restricted in their activities as long as they stayed inside the Yuan compound. Shikai set up a school for them in the residence and hired women teachers to teach them subjects like Chinese, English, math, and general sciences. They were also encouraged to learn poetry writing, painting, and calligraphy. However, there was one principal rule that they must obey: they were not allowed to go outside of the Yuan compound. Shikai believed that his daughters must be properly raised as first class ladies of a most illustrious family, so that when they grew up, they could be married to the sons of his political

---

30 His eldest Keding was whipped when Shikai discovered that he printed bogus newspaper to advocate the restoration of monarchy; 4th son Keduan was beaten with sticks for playing with water, 3rd son Keliang was also whipped several times for various “stupid” misdeeds--Yang, Shubiao and Guoyung Wang 杨树标 王国永(2001) Yuan Shikai Jia Shi 袁世凯家事 (Family Affairs of Yuan Shikai) p. 196-197
allies. He was concerned that if his daughters mingled with the outside world, they might be influenced by undesirable friends and picked up bad habits that might damage their reputation and virtue.

Although life in this large household seemed peaceful and orderly, it did not mean that everyone in the family was happy. The concubines, although they feared Shen and Yang, still plotted intrigues against each other secretly to compete for Shikai’s favor. Shikai’s sons felt that they were oppressed and restricted by their father’s authoritative governance. Although they could pursue their activities outside the compound without Shikai’s knowledge, they must still obey Shikai’s rules in the house. The daughters, on the other hand, felt that they were imprisoned in a gilded cage. They longed to see the world outside, but their freedom was denied as long as Shikai was the patriarch of the house.

Shikai’ household was like a small kingdom ruled by a monarch with absolute power. It existed blissfully under the shade of its ruler. However, when Shikai died in 1916, the kingdom lost its leader and quickly fell apart. Shikai’s successor Li Yuanhong 黎元洪 moved the family out of Zhongnanhai. They returned to Xiaobailou in Tianjin, but soon found that they could not afford to keep such a large compound. In 1920’s, the family sold the compound, shared Shikai’s estate, and finally split up.

Children of the Family

Sons

Of Shikai’s seventeen sons, only his eldest son Keding 克定, his 2d son Kewen 克文, his 6th and 8th sons Kehuan 克桓 and Kezhen 克轸 were well known in history. Keding was the political schemer who used intrigues and plots to restore the monarchy; Kewen was the talented poet, painter, calligrapher, and also a romantic womanizer, Kehuan and Kezhen were China’s first successful industrialists. Their live stories were sketched in the authors’ previous paper and will not repeated here.

The rest of Shikai’s sons were a group of young men born with silver spoons and lived in extravagance. Most of them were the typical “gong zi ge er” 公子哥儿 (pampered sons of wealthy families) of the time. They spent money in luxuries, indulged in gambling, drinking,
drugs and women. They had none of the hard working, diligent, and resilient spirit of their forefathers. They spent lavishly when Shikai was alive; and after his death, they quickly wasted all of their inheritance. Shikai sent most of them to Europe and America to be educated, but none of them did anything productive with their knowledge. After Shikai died, they lived off their inheritance, indulged in vice habits, and died in destitution. It was most unfortunate that a once renowned and powerful family, built by the efforts of so many distinguished fathers, would fall apart so easily and quickly in the hands of decadent descendents.

3rd son Keliang 克良 (son of Jinshi 金氏)

Keliang was probably the least favored son of Shikai. He was obtuse, bad tempered, and capricious. Shikai called him a “stupid rogue who could do nothing right”31 Unfortunately Shikai was correct in his characterization. Keliang never did anything useful in his life. Instead, he was known for kidnapping an opera singer to be his concubine, and also for smashing some very valuable antique tablets to pieces when the guards at Zhongnanhai would not allow him to take those tablets home. He also tried to work as a secret police for Kedin, but failed on many of his tasks. Once, he was told to keep close surveillance of the revolutionary Cai e 蔡鍔, in order to prevent him from fleeing to the south. However, Cai fooled Kenan with the help of a courtesan and managed to escape safely. Shikai and Kedin were furious. Later on, Cai joined forces with Sun Yetsan and raised armies to attack Shikai, causing the latter’s downfall.

After Shikai death, Keliang continued to live in a world of wine and women, spending his inheritance lavishly. His wife Zhangshi, daughter of late Qing’s minister of education, died in middle age. His concubine, the opera singer, left him and stole most of his valuables. Keliang fell ill after this blow and eventually lost his mind. He died in poverty in 1948, leaving two sons and three daughters.

4th son Keduan 克端 (son of Minshi 闽氏)

Keduan was another son not favored by Shikai. When Shikai was preparing the restoration of monarchy, Keduan called himself “the 4th son of the emperor”, lived lavishly and did nothing productive. His only talent was calligraphy, which was comparable to the art of his

31 Ibid, p. 196
brother Kewen. He and his wife Heshi were both opium addicts. After Shikai’s death, they spent most of their inheritance in opium, even grabbing the money for his sons’ tuition to buy the drug. One of his sons, Jiali 家礼, committed suicide out of anger and frustration. This tragedy, however, did nothing to cure the couple’s addiction. After depleting his inheritance, Keduan supported himself by selling calligraphy. He died in 1951. Besides Jiali, he had one other son and two daughters.

5th son Kequan 克权 (son flush 吴氏)

Kequan was one of Shikai’s most favorable sons. He was intelligent, industrious, and a distinguished poet. Shikai sent him with his 6th son Kehuan and 7th son Keqi to England to be educated. While Kehuan learned to be an industrialist and Keqi learned the tricks of speculation, Kequan immersed himself in the study of literature. After he returned to China, Shikai had indicated that he wanted to appoint him as his successor, but Kequan was not at all interested in politics. He was a honest and kind man, but very reserved and quiet. His only interest was to write poetry. After Shikai’s death, he lived with his family like a hermit. His married the daughter of another prominent Qing governor Duanfeng 端方. Unlike his brothers, he was not a womanizer but stayed loyal to his wife all his life. Recently, his granddaughter Yuan Xin 袁忻 published a complete collection of his poems. His lyrics more of less reflected his own experiences: life in a rich and powerful family, opposition to his father’s restoration of monarchy, and feelings and reflections after the fall of the Shikai. His poems could be read as literary works, but also could be studied as documents of the Yuan family history. Kequan died in 1941, leaving four sons and four daughters.

7th son Keqi 克齐 (son of Wushi 吴氏)

Together with his two brothers, Keqi also went to England to study in his youth, but he was more interested in making speculations for profit. After Shikai’s death, he invested a large fortune to speculate in Russian rubles, but lost the speculation when the Tsar was executed. This failure was a heavy blow to him and he became quite unbalanced since. In his later years, he and his wife both became religious fanatics and opium addicts. Keqi left one son and one daughter.

9th son Kejiu 克玖 (son of Yangshi 杨氏)
Kejiu was educated in the United States, along with his 11th brother Kean, and his 12th brother Kedu. He stayed in the States for 10 years before returning to China. He first worked for a glass manufacturing factory as an English secretary, then joined his 6th brother’s cement company as its business manager. Kejiu was married three times, his first wife Lishi 黎氏 was the daughter of Shikai’s successor, 2d president of China Li Yuanhong 黎元洪, Lishi was mentally ill, but Keju married her anyway because of her rich dowry. After the wedding, Keju sent Lishi to a mental hospital while he lived with a dancing girl, whom he married when Lishi died. However, they were divorced shortly afterwards. His 3rd wife Zhangshi outlived until Kejiu until she was in her nineties. Kejiu died in 1974, leaving no children.

10th son Kejian 克坚 (son of Wushi) 吳氏

Kejian studied political economics at Harvard. In the 1930’s he returned to China and worked briefly as an English secretary for a government agency. After leaving that job, he never worked again but lived on his inheritance all his life. He was originally engaged to the daughter of Shikai’s military comrade Xu Shichang 徐世昌, but since Shikai had died and the Yuan family was no longer in power, Xu rejected the engagement, much to Kejian’s frustration and anger. Eventually he married Lushi, and had two sons and one daughter by her. Kejian died in 1960, just before the Cultural Revolution swept over China.

11th son Kean 克安 (son of Yangshi 杨氏)

Kean was sent to the United States as a young boy and actually grew up there. His English was excellent, but his mother Yangshi also pressured him to study Chinese, which he did very well. Because of his multi lingual abilities, he was sought by many business concerns. He chose to work for his brother’s mining company until the outbreak of Sino-Japanese war. Unwilling to serve the Japanese, he resigned. When the Japanese government invited him to go to Tokyo to pay respect to its emperor; he refused to go, feigning illness. After the war, Kean joined China Airlines in Taiwan as an executive until he retired.

Story of Kean’s two marriages were well known in family history. Originally he was engaged to Li Baohui 李宝慧, sister of a very rich salt merchant. Being a romantic who did not believe in arranged marriages, he fell in love with Zhang Meishang 张美生, a westernized girl
who also came back to China from the States. Zhang was a social star admired by many young men, but had no money or status. Kean’s mother forbid Kean to see Meisheng, and insisted that he must marry Baohui because of her dowry. So Kean followed his brother Kejiu’s example. He married Baohui first and obtained her dowry. After they were married, he treated her with utter indifference but continued to see Meisheng. Baohui, who was in fragile health to begin with, died of a broken heart only eight months after the wedding. Shortly afterwards, Kean married Meisheng. The couple had two sons and eventually settled in New York after Kean’s retirement.

12th son Kedu 克度 (son of Wushi 吴氏)

Kedu was a chemist educated in the United States. Because of his excellent English and his elegant, westernized manners, he was very popular in the social circles of Tianjin. His unique skill was to make imitation perfumes. He could produce perfumes with the same fragrance as French perfumes, but at much lower prices. He was much sought after by the modern ladies of Tianjin because of this skill, but he never took advantage of this opportunity to set up a business. Only when he was out of money, he would sell a bottle or two.

Kedu never worked in his life but lived on his inheritance. His marriage was another sad story. His wife Lo Peiru 罗沛如 was a well known painter and poetess from a good family. As a wife she was virtuous, kindhearted, and obedient, but she could not win the heart of her husband. Instead, Kedu fell madly in love with a dancing girl named Yang Suyuan 杨淑原. After his mother died, he moved Yang to the house and live with her like a couple, totally ignoring his wife and infant daughter. When he was out of money, he would demand Lo to give him money or jewelry, and Lo, being a “good” wife, would submit to him. His only daughter, Jiamin 家敏, despised him and never forgave him. Even when Kedu was poor and ill in his old age, she refused to help him. Yang Suyuan, fortunately, was loyal to Kedu. She worked at manual jobs to support him until he died in 1976.

13rd son Kexiang 克相 (son of Gaoshi 郭氏)

Kexiang was one of Shikai’s more promising sons. He graduated from one of the best universities in China, the Yan Jing 燕京 University. His English and Chinese were both excellent.
Unlike his brothers who lived on their inheritance, he worked as a high school English teacher all his life. His wife was the daughter of Qing minister NaTong 那桐. Unfortunately, fate did not allow him to live peacefully. During the Cultural Revolution, he was persecuted, beaten and humiliated repeatedly because of his family background. Finally, he lost his will to live and committed suicide.

14th son Kejie 克捷 (son of Yeshi 叶氏)

Not much is known about the life of Kejie. It was rumored that he was arrested and imprisoned for many years because he made heroine illegally, but there was no proof that this rumor was true. He died in the remote province of Qinghai; how and why he ended up there no one knows.

15th son Kehe (son of Guoshi 郭氏)

Kehe led a plain and uneventful life. He graduated from Gong Sheng 工商 University in Tianjin, but except to teach in a school for about a year, he never worked and lived on his inheritance. According to his grandson, he was strict with children, but kind and generous to his friends and servants. When he died, he did not leave anything to his family. Kehe married Zhang Wanyi 张文仪, daughter from one of the richest families in Tianjin. He had one son and one daughter.

16th son Kefan 克藩 (son of Liushi 刘氏)

Kefan died of scarlet fever when he was 13.

17th son Keyou 可有 (son of Yeshi 叶氏)

Of all the sons, Keyou, the youngest, was most absurd. He opened a hospital in Tianjin, then gave it because it did not bring him enough money. He changed his trade to make custom jewelry, which also failed. When the Sino-Japanese broke out, he went back to Henan and organized a militia to fight the Japanese. In the Civil War that followed, he fought against the Liberation Army and was captured. Fortunately, the commander of the troops was his old classmate, and he was released. Eventually he went back to Tanjin and died in 1953. He had two
daughters and one son. When the Liberation Army invaded Xiangcheng, he gave his nine year old daughter Jiahui 家惠 to a neighbor to take her to safety. This neighbor lost the girl on the way. Jiahui spent five years wandering by herself until she finally found her way back to Henan.

**Daughters**

Shikai’s daughters were raised as “ladies of gold” (ladies from very wealthy families). Although they were educated, they were not expected to make use of their knowledge. A daughter’s role was to learn all the protocols of a high class lady, and then marry a son from a equally wealthy family or a son of Shikai’s political ally. Whether she was willing to marry mattered little to her parents. Her fate was not different from some of her sister in-laws, who were forced to marry her brothers because of the same reasons.

Of Shikai’s fifteen daughters, two were best known in family history:

*3rd daughter Shuzhen 叔桢 (daughter of Jinshi 金氏)*

Shuzhen was the “tomboy” of the family. Unlike her sisters, she was frank, straightforward, and daring. When it was discovered that her eldest brother Kedin was using bogus newspaper to deceive Shikai about the restoration of monarchy, she was the only one among her siblings who dared to tell Shikai the truth. Shuzhen was very close to her 2d brother Kewan. They both belonged to an underworld society; Shuzhen was even the head of a women’s unit. The Yuan family did not approve of her actions, but since Shikai had died, no one was able to stop her.

Shuzhen married YangYuxun 杨毓珣, nephew of a Qing governor. The couple did not get along and went separate ways shortly after they were married. However, when Yang was imprisoned for being a traitor in the Sino-Japanese war, it was his wife Shuzhen who used her connections to rescue him.

Shuzhen was best known for her book, “My father Yuan Shikai.”(Wo de Fu Yuan 我的父亲) Published in the 1950s, her book revealed the details of Shikai’s daily life, his
relationship with his wives and children, and the conditions of Yuan family in Shikai’s time. It is an invaluable document about the Yuan family history.

14th daughter Huzhen 怙祯 daughter of Guoshi 郭氏

Huzhen was one of the 2 daughters who dared to file for divorce. Originally she was married to Cao Shiyue 唐士岳, son of the warlord Cao Kun 唐锟. Cao was a typical dandy who indulged in all kinds of luxuries. He also had a vile temper and fought with Huzhen frequently. Once, during an argument over his lavish ways of spending money, Cao pulled out a gun and shot Huzhen in the arm. His act of violence sealed the fate of their marriage. No matter how many apologies and how much monetary compensation were offered, Huzhen insisted on a divorce. To avoid the case to go to court, the Cao family finally agreed. After the divorce Huzhen went to live in Shanghai to avoid the scandal. There, she met Zhang Delu 张德禄, a diplomat who just returned from France. The two married soon afterwards and Huzhen left China with her husband who worked for the United Nations. They finally settled in New York, Because Huzhen was the highest ranked Yuan descendent, she became the head of the Yuan family in the United States. Huzhen died in 2005, at the age of 90, leaving one daughter and two sons.

Shikai’s other daughters all followed a similar pattern of life. Brought up as well educated ladies of an illustrious family, married sons of equally important families, and spent the rest of their days serving their husbands and raising children. Although their marriages seemed to be well matched in social and financial status with their husbands, only very few ended happily.

Eldest daughter Bozhen 伯祯

Bozhen married Zhang Yuanliang 张元亮, son of a Qing governor who was a good friend of Shikai. She was Shikai’s favorite daughter, well trained by her mother to be a dutiful daughter of good virtues. Her wedding was a much celebrated event in Beijing, since she was Shikai’s first daughter to be married. Bozhen was fortunate that Zhang was a good husband they had a loving relationship until the end.
2nd daughter Zhongzhen 仲祯  Zhongzhen married politician Xue Xuehai 薛学海, son of a famous Qing diplomat. Their marriage ended in separation; Zhongzhen emigrated to the United States and lived with Huzhen until she died in the 1970’s. Xuehai lived in Kowloon where he became a popular free lance writer for newspapers and journals.

5th daughter Jizhen 季祯  and 13th daughter Yizhen 仪祯

Jizhen married Lu Baozhong 陆宝忠, son of Qing ‘s last prime minister. She was in ill health and died early in the marriage. Her younger sister Yizhen later married the widower also.

6th daughter Luzhen 禄祯

Died soon after her marriage to the nephew of premier of China Sun Baoqi 孙宝琦.

7th daughter Fuzhen 复祯

Married Qing minister Yinchang’s 荫昌 son Tiege 铁阁. He deserted her to marry a German woman who was his mistress prior to his marriage. Fuzhen brought up her son Chengzu 承祖 by herself. Chengzu never met his father until he was an adult.

10th daughter Sizhen 思祯

Married a traitor in the Sino-Japanese war who was executed after the war. Sizhen remarried later.

11th daughter Qizhen 琪祯

Married Wang Xiaoqing 王少卿. The marriage ended in divorce.

13th daughter Yizhen 仪祯

Not much was known about her adult life except that she emigrated to the United States and died there.

4th, 8th, 9th and 15th daughters

They all died young without reaching adulthood.
Breaking up of the Family

By the 1950’s, most of Shikai’s sons and daughters had either died or went abroad. The remaining Yuan children in China had no inheritance to speak of, no roots to rely on. The glory and eminence of the Yuan family vanished forever. The descendents must fend for themselves. It was unfortunate that a once renowned and powerful family, built by the efforts of so many distinguished fathers, would fall apart so easily and quickly.

Most of the Yuan children managed to survive independently on their own. However, another calamity struck the family during the Cultural Revolution in the 1960s and 70s. Because they were Shikai’s descendents, they were persecuted and humiliated again and again. Some older ones could not bear such persecution and committed suicide. Younger ones were sent to remote frontier camps to be reformed by labor. Most unfortunately, the Yuan homes were wrecked, and important family relics, documents, and personal papers were burnt and destroyed. During this disaster, the Yuan descendents were dispersed and lost contact with each other. Their once large and extended family ceased to exist. It was not until Shikai’s grandson Yuan Jialiu 袁家骝 and his wife Wu Jiangxung 吴健旬, both renounced physicists, returned from the States to visit China in the 1980s, that the Chinese government began to change its label and stigma against the Yuan family.

Following the rehabilitation of the Yuan family in late 20th early 21st centuries, 3rd and 4th generation Yuan descendents began to rebuild their family history from books and documents that were preserved. Their own life stories were also recorded and added. The authors’ next research will focus on this new addition of the Yuan chronicle.
Part III. Genealogy Chart of Yuan Shikai’s Family 袁世凯家族家谱

(From Xiangcheng Li Dai Po Xi Zhi 项城历代谱系志 (Xiangcheng Genealogy Records))
(4) 四门一系

四子袁克瑞
- 家礼
- 家宾
- 家聘（女）
- 家轩
- 家说
- 家健

五子袁克权
- 家训（女）
- 家著
- 家诜（女）
- 家鍾（女，在美）
- 家诒（女）

六子袁克恒
- 家宸
- 家卫
- 家英
- 家 предус
- 家萐（女，在美）
- 家薇
- 家蕊（天津）

- 袁森（在美）

七子袁克齐
- 家艺
- 家並同意

八子袁克铮
- 家蕴（女）
- 家芸（女）
- 家淦（女）
四-4

九子袁克玖

十子袁克坚

十一子袁克安

十二子袁克度

十三子袁克相（不仕）

十四子袁克健

十五子袁克和

十六子袁克藩（十三岁亡）

十七子袁克有
Bibliography

Books


Xiangcheng Zu Po (2011) Xiangcheng Yuan Shi Li Dai Po Xi Zhi 项城历代谱系志 (Xiangcheng Genealogy Records)


Yuan, Jingxue 袁静雪 (1962) *Wo Di Fu Qin Yuan Shikai* 我的父亲袁世凯(My Father Yuan Shikai) [out of print]

Yuan, Xiaolin (ed.)袁晓林编 (2011) *Dan Chu Hou Men De Shi Shui Liao Nien* 淡出豪 门 的逝水流年 (Fading out from the Illustrious Family) Xiangcheng: Yuan Fu Wen Hua 项城: 袁府文化公司.
Personal Interviews

Yin, Chengzu 荫承祖  2008; 2011 (telephone)

Yuan, Jiacheng 袁家诚  2008

Yuan, Jiamin 袁家敏  2008; 2011 (telephone)