



Yang Paifeng

Yang Paifeng was a maidservant from the Yang family of generals. The Yang family, at least in legend, seemed pretty egalitarian by the standards of the day - both women and men were formidable warriors.

Wives came from other military/martial artist families and were well-trained in the arts of war before joining the Yang family. Even the servants were expected to train in the martial arts, functioning a private army.

Yang Paifeng requested to go to the battlefield to fight the Liao (Khitans) invaders. Since she had not been in actual combat before, she first proved her mettle by defeating an older, more experienced male Song officer.

Seeing Yang Paifeng's astonishing strength and skill, the matriarch of the Yang family brought out the armour she wore in her youth and put it on the young upstart. Yang Paifeng went on to flatten enemy generals with her staff.

According to popular tradition up through the Ming Dynasty (which preceded the Manchurian Qing Dynasty), Yang Paifeng's upper body strength was exceptional, not just by women's standards but by human standards. However, when the Manchurians established the Qing Dynasty, they promoted a different version of the legend of Yang Paifeng's victory in which she defeated the enemy using a clever fire-spouting pole, instead of using brute force as in the original story.

The alleged aim of promoting this new lore was to preserve the conqueror's control by watering down the fighting spirit of not only Chinese women, but Chinese people in general.

