



## The Ballad of Mulan

*Song Nan Zhang*

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## **The Ballad of Mulan** Song Nan Zhang

A folk song dating from the Northern Wei dynasty (A.D. 386-534) tells about Mulan disguising herself as a man and taking her father's place in battle.

## **The Ballad of Mulan Details**

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## From Reader Review The Ballad of Mulan for online ebook

### Alex Farrand says

*"They say the male rabbit likes to hop and leap, while the female rabbit prefers to sit still. But in times of danger, when the two rabbits scurry by, who can tell male from female?"*

*The Ballad of Mulan* is about a woman who disguises herself to join the army in her father's place.

I first heard of Mulan's tale during the Disney animated film, *Mulan*. I absolutely loved it from the first moment I saw it. Here was a strong, courageous woman, fighting for her country, even if it meant to disguise herself and not follow traditional gender roles. It was nice to see a different kind of woman on the big screen. A woman who controlled life, and wasn't a damsel in distress, like Aurora, Cinderella, Snow White, etc. Mulan was smart, and didn't need to live under a man. The songs in the film helped it along, too. I am always singing *Reflection* around my house. It speaks to my soul. **"Who is that girl I see. Staring straight back at me."**

Well, surprisingly this isn't the original work, which I expected. This version of the story is a children's book, and it has beautiful pictures. The title is a little misleading, since it is a story and not a song. I mean, I could sing it to my daughter, but I doubt it wouldn't be lovely. So, I was a little disappointed that it wasn't the original ballad, but I can at least read it to Jac. This book would make a lovely cultural book to give to children, and one day I would like to get a hard copy to give to Jac.

Still, I loved it. I just love Mulan. If the ballad is based on a real event, I am super impressed. Again, here is a woman defying traditional gender roles, and being courageous in the face of danger. She is a role model for women, that a women could do anything, accomplish anything, and stand as an equal to men. Yes, she did dress in male attire, but I wouldn't be running around in a dress during war. The ballad never mentioned that the men asked her gender either, but they just assumed she was a male. I love the last line of the book, because it is true for any protest, or war effort. Who cares who stands by you, at least they are fighting the same effort. They are fighting for change. We shouldn't be doing things alone.

*The Ballad of Mulan* is a tale of a young woman, who courageously fought beside men during a time of turmoil. It is a lovely, cultural children's book that I hope to read to Jac multiple times. Happy reading!

Eventually, I found the ballad. I saw a few of the same ballads with translation differences, but here is one website. <http://www.yellowbridge.com/onlinelit...>

Read my blog here: [www.dancingbetweenthecovers.com](http://www.dancingbetweenthecovers.com)

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### May?a says

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### **Lzhao says**

I like the story of Mulan when I was a little girl. I did little research about the children books about Mulan. In the research, there are seven Chinese children books and movies that were examined, and they are all about Mulan who is a famous heroine in Chinese traditional legends. She, as a girl, stands up to protect her country when her country was invaded. The story was originally described in a Chinese poem known as the Ballad of Mulan. In the poem, Mulan took her aged father's place in the army. She fought for twelve years and gained high merit, but she refused to become a government official and returned to her hometown instead.

The books and movies in the research all are illustrating the story. When people read these books and watch the movies, they may ask if they are authentic culturally. Most of the books are considered very authentic. The text of most books includes three parts, which are the original poem, Chinese and English translation of poem.

However, the theme is shafting from the books to movies. In the original poem, Mulan took his father's place

to protect her country from invaders because her father was too old to fight. The poem is advocating filial piety. It is a viewpoint of Confucius. Confucius theories influenced China for thousands of years, and filial piety is an important one. It says that people should love, support, respect and obey their parents highly in the family, and obey the emperor in the society. Based on that, Mulan was a good daughter and courtier. It is why the story was spread widely in China.

The themes of the movie are different from the most of books. In the first movie, Mulan is a loveable, spirited girl who doesn't fit in with Chinese tradition because she always speaks her mind and follows her heart. When her country was invaded, she took her aged father's place in the army, and being true to her heart also brings her victory in the end and honor to her family. The theme of the movie is about following her heart to find her success. In the second movie, it is still a main theme. It also talks about trust between people who love each other.

The theme are shifting mostly because of the reader and audience. The readers of the books are children from Chinese heritage families, and the people who are interested in or learning Chinese language and culture. The audience of the movies is all American children and their families. The themes should be understandable for the readers and audience.

The original poem of Mulan was written in ancient Chinese. The translation is very interesting. In most of Mulan books, the poem is translated into contemporary Chinese first, and then, author translates it into English. Most of books translate the poem contextually. It is hard to do sometimes because it may loss information. For example, in one book, it did not mention that Mulan has an older sister and a younger brother. In the movies, Mulan also is a single child at home. Only one book did it literally. In this book, the author even translated the onomatopoeia words at the beginning of the poem. In the English translation, the geographic terms such as Black Mountain or "Hei Shan", Yellow River or "Huang He" are translated appropriately. However, the Chinese kinship terms are complicated. Younger brother is different from older brother. Older sister are different from younger sister. Mulan has a younger brother and an older sister. The English translation is wrong on the kinship terms sometimes.

I consider that those children books are good resources to teach Chinese in class. Chinese teachers could have students to see the pictures first, and let them tell story in Chinese based on the pictures. Teachers should not give them any background knowledge of the story before it. The students are very creative based on my experience. Even one of my students told a similar story of Mulan.

Then, they can compare their stories with the original story in Chinese. The students will talk about why they think their story is reasonable, and if they like or dislike the original story. The teachers can talk about the background and cultural elements of the story and lead the discussion guided by questions.

After that, teachers can ask the students to compare and contrast Mulan with a heroine in their own culture.

At last, the students could have a reading competition on the original poem with music.

It is always fun when teachers and students talking about Mulan.

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## Artemis says

A short poem of the ages; a beautiful minute of your time.

I love 'Mulan', the animated Disney adaptation, and it's a treat to read the ancient ballad - roughly translated in English - about the legend of the woman who traveled and fought for China disguised as a man to save her father and brother. And her country.

If Mulan, or another woman like her with a different name, did exist, then women have always been awesome. If she didn't, then women were always recognized to be awesome.

The final verse:

"The he-hare's feet go hop and skip,  
The she-hare's eyes are muddled and fuddled.  
Two hares running side by side close to the ground,  
How can they tell if I am he or she?"

Or another translation:

" They say the male rabbit likes to hop and leap,  
while the female rabbit prefers to sit still.  
But in times of danger, when the two rabbits scurry by,  
who can tell male from female?"

'The Ballad of Mulan' - A simple, wonderful little journey expounding years of war.

Mulan - The warrior woman of hope for China.

Final Score: 4/5

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### **Drew Graham says**

Mulan lived with her family in peaceful northern China. But when news of war reaches their home, Mulan is dismayed to see her aged father's name on the Emperor's enlistment scrolls. Unwilling to allow her sickly parent to go to war, probably never to return, Mulan disguises herself as a young man and goes to war in his place, leading her to perform great and brave deeds, her identity as a woman unknown to all around her.

When I reached Mulan in my Disney source material read-through, I came to the conclusion after doing some research that this story goes back so far, it's basically impossible to find the *truly* original version of this ballad. But in my search, I found this telling from about twenty years ago that is presented in such a way that it feels *very* authentic, and as far as I'm concerned as faithful to the original telling as it comes. It feels epic and personal at the same time, focusing on the character of Mulan and her motives for going to war. This wasn't a tomboy out with something to prove, but a refined young lady willing to do whatever it takes to protect her family and the country she loves. The writing is simplistic and of course the moral is strong, and even a little heavy-handed, but with a story like this neither of those issues seem to matter. The art by the author is detailed and elaborate, indicating a heavy amount of research to understand the time period and setting and culture. (I will say that the art was so detailed at times that it was hard to pick out key figures and characters, but that's not a huge problem.) It features a lot of Chinese text and characters throughout, and even a few historical photographs and notes here and there, which give the whole experience a real sense of depth and truth. This may be a legend, but the author's presentation here makes it seem very plausible, and even probable.

This simple but effective retelling of the story of Mulan, with its Chinese characters throughout and its

clearly researched illustrations, feels authentic and historical. Even if this story didn't really happen, it seems from reading this book that it could have.

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## **Maria says**

### **On War & Honour**

War and, more specifically, fighting in a war, is a theme I meditate upon with disturbing frequency, given that I have never been directly threatened by it. My first line of thinking is that I would flee, that I would refuse to fight. And I see no shame in that.

One could argue that if we all did so, there'd be no one to fight and we would swiftly be overthrown. That doesn't seem like a bad unravelling of events for me, if we all got to flee. Being an adaptable person, I would try to go on with my life in another country. But it's never like that, is it? Not everyone manages to flee, and that's why I hesitate in denying I have responsibility. I don't think I would have to answer for the slaughter of ""my"" people, but would it not weigh on my conscience that I did nothing for the innocent and helpless? Perhaps I would pledge to get as many people out as I could.

Honour is an extremely important motif in the Chinese culture. And it's one I don't much relate with, because too often it makes us shortsighted. I understand how beneficial it is for cohesion, perhaps I am too individualistic. Fighting to honour our country, to honour our family, solely for honour's sake, is a concept that does not move me.

The case of Mulan is one I can admire because, not knowing how feasible it was for her family to run away, I believe taking her old father's place is of commendable selflessness and courage. Add to her backbone her skilfulness in battle and we have a very powerful character. All the more powerful for being so humble.

Victory achieved, she was offered anything, and asked only to return home. Return she did, and gladly changed her armour for one of her favourite dresses. There is no need to romanticize war. What I find so wonderful about Mulan was the art with which she adapted to a most undesirable situation, keeping her motivations and values clear in her mind, and the grace with which she left it all behind as soon as her duty was fulfilled. The artistry in this poem is how well it portrays in so few lines this admirable character - an example of tenacity and strength - as more than a war machine: a human being, multifaced, intricate.

Bravery and altruism are values I aspire to, but according to my standards, not anyone else's. One could point this out as a cowardly way to always have a clear conscience. I am not sufficiently apprised of other people's consciences to know if this principle would be beneficial or harmful if applied to everyone. But knowing my conscience, I rely on her more than on other people's norms. I see how this can be dangerous and therefore will not disregard other people's critics towards my behaviour, but ultimately I answer to myself and myself only.

Studying history, one understands that countries are fragile and mutable; that throughout times, there have always been people interested in overthrowing others in the pursuit of their own interests. And studying biology, one realizes that analogous processes take place with other species.

I think the question here is whether I would die for the interests of powerful people. And the answer is no. Selfish or not, I love life too much to watch it decay in a war zone.

People will fight to protect their home, but nothing smaller than the world can be home for me.

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## **Stephany Hensley says**

This is a wonderful fantasy story about a young girl named Mulan. She lives in China, and when her father is sworn into war by the law, Mulan disguises herself as a man, to serve in the army, to protect her older father

from being sent into war. She serves in the war and does very well, until she had to get medical help and her true identity was found. She still overcomes the hardships of war, by the side of her guardian angel the red dragon. She defeats the enemy and China admires her for her bravery. This is a great story for young children, this is a fantasy that children may be interested in. From second grade till fourth or fifth grade, Mulan can interest both boys and girls. A girl who fights in battle, and overcomes the war. The dominant theme seems to be perseverance, and following your heart. Mulan followed her intuition to protecting her father, and she ended up helping save the country. I rated this book well because it is a great fantasy story that will interest children, and have them hear a story about a young girl who made a huge impact.

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### **D?ηη? says**

I have read the original, illustrated ballad of Mulan.

I must say, the Chinese writers of this specific ballad are very different from Westerners writers. It is for, the Chinese writers do not let any emotion slip into the ballad. They wrote it as it was, and that is it. That is why I am awfully disappointed, and I feel like the Disney movie, my favorite as a young girl, was so much better, so thrilling, so real. I love the adaption, although they probably changed a lot of things. Still, Disney wins.

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### **Rachael says**

This is a great telling of the story of Mulan. Very different from the American/ Disney version. Refreshing.

This book would be great to pair with other books depicting the story of Mulan in a Social Studies classroom so that you could look at perspectives and how stories change depending on what culture they are written through. We can also look at cultural stereotypes and how they are portrayed when stories are written within and outside of a culture.

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### **K. Anna Hardy says**

I arranged my thoughts on this beautiful poem into a haiku as best as I could:

"Saving one's country  
Is but a grand byproduct  
Of protecting home."

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### **Amie says**

This was EXCELLENT. While reading it, my teenager exclaimed "This is NOTHING like the movie."

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### **Aleta says**

Very short with seemingly irrelevant details and a lack of details of what would seem to be any resemblance to a “plot”, this is quite different from anything I’m used to. Trying to rate this would be like trying to tell a pilot how to do his job – I don’t know anything of Chinese literature, society or culture, which means I have absolutely no idea whether this is a good or bad example of a Chinese ballad. Add to that the very different translations that are out there on the internet and you have yourself an unratable book (to me, that is).

I read the original (though translated), not this longer version, but the original is not to be found on GR apparently. It will literally take you 5 minutes to read, unless you want to really study it of course, and so could hardly be a waste of time. If you have seen the Disney movie, not much will be new to you; Mulan goes to war to fight in her father’s stead, meets the Khan (= the Emperor in the movie) and goes home where her soldier-buddies sees she’s a girl and are much surprised. End of story. Not really anything about the war, but several lines are used to describe what she and her family does as she arrives at home.

In the end it didn’t leave much of an impression, except for the fact that it surprisingly seems to be almost feminist. And I believe my review is now officially longer than the text itself.

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### **Sofie Brånedal says**

Amazing poem. As well as the history behind it, and the modern development of it. Fascinating. Five stars is the only suitable rating.

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### **McKinley says**

beautiful illustrations, quick story outline

This book has striking illustrations. You might know the story from the Disney retelling. Mulan disguises herself as a man and joins the army so that her old, frail father doesn’t have to go to war. Over the course of ten years she shows herself to be a remarkable warrior and becomes a famous general. However, her true identity as a female remains hidden until the very end of the tale. Over fifteen centuries later, Mulan continues to be an inspiration to not only Chinese girls and women but people around globe.

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### **Sharon Medina says**

This is a folk tale about a girl who disguised herself as a man which led the army of China in war and won against their enemy and written as a poem. With her hard work and courage she had gained the respect and rank. She was very proud of her father and remained in her heart and honored him. She finally returned home and changed out of her armor and into her favorite dress. When she appeared, her men could not believe that for the past ten years they fought side by side and never realized that “he” was a “she”. She served her country and never asked for anything in return.

Genre: Traditional Fiction

Suggested Ages: 6 to 10 years old

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