

Mulan, the story about a warrior adapting to all eras

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When rumors of a non-cartoon, non-musical version of "Mulan" began to leak a few years ago, many stalwart fans of the 1998 Disney original complained. No big musical numbers and ballads? No Mushu, the prankster dragon, or Li Shang, the film's ambivalent love interest?

Many **felt that the filmmakers were being unfaithful to Mulan's legend**, or at least to Disney's version of her.

But **Mulan has always been a most adaptable heroine**. Long before fans criticized Disney for taking liberties with its beloved animated heroine, poets, writers, playwrights and filmmakers had centuries to create tremendously dissimilar versions of the legendary warrior woman. In some, she is a hardened army general; in others, it has magical powers. In an animated version, he's a bug.

In the most recent "Mulan," which premiered on September 4 at Disney+, Chinese-American actress Yifei Liu protagonizes a story that combines stunning **battle sequences (the film's \$200 million budget included a 80-way lucky rider from Kazakhstan and Mongolia)** with a story that brings out a lot of juice to the genre-changing subtexts of the story.

And while there isn't a Mushu ("we really needed Mulan to face his own challenges," director Niki Caro said), there are several references to the 1998 animated film. There are also references to several earlier versions of history, including the "Balada de Mulan", **the poem of the 5th or 6th century that started it all**.

The "Mulan Ballad" is a relatively simple story, of only six stanzas: Mulan leaves his village to take the place of his sick father in the Emperor's Army. For a dozen years, she serves nobly, all the time disguised as a man; in the end, she refuses to receive rewards and honors to return home, where her former comrades finally discover that, surprise, Mulan is a woman.

Later versions of Mulan's story added plots and details to develop the story. At the end of the 1695 novel "The Romance of the Sui and Tang Dynasties," Mulan takes his own life when the Khan calls her to be his concubine.

In the 1939 Chinese film "Mulan Joins the Army," **heroine is a skilled hunter**, warrior and eventually general; The tape ends with Mulan as a bride.

When Disney performers began working on Mulan's latest story, they **sought inspiration in a variety of versions**. There was the original ballad as well as regional variations.

"We drilled down to see what elements had remained consistent over time and what elements had been altered to fit the moment and the medium in which the story was being told," said Jason Reed, one of the producers.

In many accounts, **Mulan is a skilled warrior before joining the Army**. The animated version portrayed Mulan as a rookie, but in the most recent we learned that Mulan has been trained since she was a child.

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In both Disney films, Mulan sneaks away under cover of darkness. However, the new one further modifies Mulan's legend, even as she underscores the virtue of filial piety, a central theme of legend.

"In all the previous versions we could find, she always ends up coming back and just going back to her old life, and we thought that wasn't a satisfying end to her journey," said Amanda Silver, who co-wrote the script.

There are many more fights than in the original Disney tape, particularly involving Mulan. Nowe just had to watch Mulan fight, Said Caro, we had to watch her fight as a **woman**. "In this version, what she learns is that she won't be truly powerful until she's herself, until she accepts her power as a young man," she added.

"I know we're not going to please everyone, " said Caro. "But I do think there is a reason why history has been so resonant and relevant **for, how much, more than 1300 years?**"

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