
Lan Dong's \textit{Mulan's Legend and Legacy in China and the United States} admirably tackles the difficult project of tracing the various narratives and images of Mulan. The author delves meticulously into a wide range of Mulan stories across time, geography and cultures, including "The Ballad of Mulan" and its adaptations in Chinese poetry, prose, drama, stage performance and folklore, Maxine Hong Kinston's book \textit{The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts} (1976),\footnote{Maxine Hong Kingston. \textit{The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts}. New York: Knopf, 1976.} children's picture books and Disney's animated films. Her thorough research and careful analysis demonstrate how representations of these stories are conditioned by the historical and cultural contexts in which the plots are reshaped and the images recast.

The book is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 1 (Prologue) provides an overview. Dong uses the concept of "palimpsest" to conceptualize the evolution of Mulan stories. She points out that this notion is apt to capture the preservation and modification as well as the erasure of Mulan representations, a layering process in which different versions are written into multiple layers, with new ones building upon or replacing old ones. "Palimpsest" is an effective trope. It vividly conveys the inconsistency and discontinuity resulting from the distinctive ways in which Mulan is characterized in the numerous sources under investigation. Moreover, it indicates connections and similarities between various narratives and images that are traceable beneath layer after layer of story-telling. For example, according to Dong, Mulan's cross-dressing is consistently represented across many stories, albeit in varied ways. How later stories of Mulan rely on, maintain, efface and transform elements from earlier versions is a central concern throughout the book.

In Chapter 2, Dong identifies two legacies of female heroism in pre-modern Chinese literary and historical documents. She argues that they provide the cultural milieu for the creation and development of the character of Mulan who achieves an
iconic status of extraordinary heroic womanhood. One legacy can be found in stories about women who serve in armed forces to support or rebel against imperial courts, while the other can be traced in accounts of female knights-errant who sever themselves from mainstream political power and seek to redress social injustices through their exceptional martial arts skills. Dong notes that although these women break Confucian gender rules excluding women from social spheres outside their families, they simultaneously conform to other prevailing ethical codes such as filial piety, loyalty, integrity, and female chastity, and, as a result, receive social acceptance. As Dong insightfully argues, the tradition of heroic women undergirds the cultural setting that fosters representations of Mulan as an exemplary, virtuous heroine rather than a deplorable, subversive transgressor. Her findings concerning the richly written lineage of female heroism also challenge the conventional, monolithic understanding of Chinese women as victims of Confucian patriarchy.

Chapter 3 examines "The Ballad of Mulan," commonly acknowledged as the original Mulan story, and its variations in literati writings, local histories and folk tales in pre-modern China. Dong demonstrates that later adaptations endow their female protagonist with many invented biographical details, for instance, feminine beauty, the possession of magical power, and the exertion of supernatural influence, thereby adding layers to the palimpsest of Mulan and contributing to her social acceptance as a national heroine.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are devoted to investigating cross-cultural productions of Mulan stories in the United States. In Chapter 4, Dong focuses on the reconfiguration of Mulan in Kingston's book *The Woman Warrior* (1976). Departing from the representation of Mulan as a loyal subject in the "Ballad," the book recasts her as a talented and trained woman warrior who takes revenge on behalf of her family and village, participates in a peasant uprising against the imperial regime, and finally beheads the emperor. Dong compellingly argues that the narrator recreates the character of Mulan by integrating various sources which rest upon what she has been told about the past, what she has learned about the Chinese cultural heritage from her
family and community, and her present life in America.
Chapter 5 looks at children's picture books, most of which are published in the United States and target English-speaking and bilingual readers. Dong observes that their authors and illustrators seek to retain the core elements of the "Ballad," while enacting new meanings in their written and visual representations of Mulan. She makes a convincing point that the strategies of narration and visualization in these works are shaped by the need to construct ethnic and cultural identities in a multicultural America, as well as the desire to reach out to diverse audiences.

In Chapter 6, Dong presents a close reading of Disney's animated films about Mulan. She argues that although Disney markets them as culturally authentic Chinese, they are hybrid products that reflect an American perception of Chineseness. She also convinces readers that in spite of their appearance as feminist texts that promote women's empowerment, these films are postfeminist discourses that reflect a false feminist consciousness and celebrate "proper" womanhood.

Chapter 7 concludes with a nicely-written reiteration of the main points in the preceding chapters and a brief comparison between Mulan and Joan of Arc.

Overall, Dong has done a very impressive job in putting together and analyzing the numerous representations of Mulan. Her arguments are clearly formulated and consistently supported by a wealth of textual evidence and illustrations. However, on rare occasions, too much attention is devoted to describing and reconstructing details of texts and images, leaving the readers wondering what to do with them analytically and theoretically. But this does not diminish the book's scholarly value. Not only does it present an original, comprehensive account of the development of Mulan tales, but it also sheds new light on how different narratives and images of Mulan convey meanings in relation to womanhood, heroism and moral values across social, cultural and historical settings.

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