



China's Bravest Girl: The Legend of Hua Mu Lan

By Charlie Chin



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Chinese translation by Wang Xing Chu. A classic retelling of the Chinese maiden warrior legend. Bilingual in English and Chinese.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

A simple rhyming text keeps the pace brisk in this adaptation of a fifth-century Chinese legend about a young woman who goes to war to save her family's honor. Hua Mu Lan's father has no eldest son, and so the faithful daughter decides "For love of her elderly father / she will dress in warrior's clothes, / walking and talking like a man, / so no one ever knows." Hua Mu Lan's "courage wins the day," and a "hundred battles," earning her the rank of general and the Emperor's highest esteem. Arai's jewel-toned paintings accurately portray the life of the period, and margins depicting a Chinese screen contain an inset of text in Chinese. But the flat, often expressionless figures move through the static compositions without making emotional contact with the reader. Children will nevertheless enjoy the heroine's exploits and the moment of revelation when her war companion discovers her true identity. When he proposes that the "best of friends" become husband and wife, the dignified Hua Mu Lan responds: "You treat your friends with honor. Can your wife expect the same?" The young man agrees, concluding this ancient legend with modern sensibilities and read-aloud appeal. Ages 6-12.

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From School Library Journal

Grade 3-5-Mu Lan, often called "the Chinese Joan of Arc," is a young woman whose aged father is summoned by the emperor to fight an invading army. She dons her father's armor, distinguishes herself in battle, only revealing her true identity when the war is over. The English version presented here is in quatrains in which meter and detail are sacrificed to relentless, often forced, rhyming. The accompanying Chinese text provides many details that do not occur in the English as well as many different sentiments. For example, when Mu Lan's father is seeing her off, the English text gives him the line "Farewell, my faithful daughter," while the Chinese version says, "Farewell! I wish you win the battle!" The Chinese text has problems with diction, mixing classical Chinese with modern colloquial (somewhat like mixing the language of the King James Bible with today's inner-city street slang). This provides much unintentional humor along the way. Both versions have Mu Lan asking for a camel, a slow-moving animal, so she can hurry home. Attractive, well-researched watercolor illustrations in vibrant primary colors have much child appeal. Another bilingual version of this significant tale, Wei and Cheng Jiang's *The Legend of Mulan* (Victory, 1992), provides somewhat different details but is also something of a mixed bag.

John Philbrook, San Francisco Public Library

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From [Booklist](#)

Ages 6-8. This partial retelling of an epic feminist poem from the medieval Soong Dynasty is in both English and Mandarin Chinese. The rhyming stanzas relate the legend of Hua Mu Lan, who, disguised as a man, went off to war in her elderly father's place. After winning 100 battles and gaining the rank of general, she returned home a hero. The story gets silly at this point. Revealing her true identity to one of her comrades (their relationship hasn't been developed), he proposes marriage ("How many times in danger / did you turn to save my life? / We were always the best of friends / Why not become husband and wife?"), and she accepts. In contrast, the full-page paintings maintain a strong Asian feeling with bold forms, bright colors, and distinctive lines. No source note or background information is provided. *Julie Corsaro*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

John Townsend:

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