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The Motif of Mulan's Homecoming in 2020 Film Adaptations

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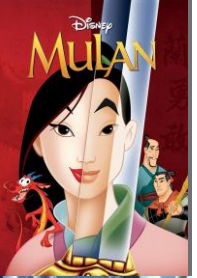
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Film Adaptations of Legend of Mulan



First wave (1927–1964): “*Militarizing filial piety*” (Edwards)



Second wave (1998–2004): Walt Disney Studios’ *Mulan* (1998) and a wave of Western-produced fairytales



Third wave (2020): Walt Disney’s action remake of *Mulan* and a wave of Chinese retellings



Mulan (dir. Niki Caro, 2020)

	Title	Director
M1	Mulan: heng kong chu shi 木兰：横空出世 (Kung Fu Mulan)	Liao Guanghua 廖光华
M2	Hua Mulan 花木兰 (Hua Mulan)	Li Yuxi 李雨夕
M3	Wu shuang Hua Mulan 无双花木兰 (Matchless Mulan)	Chen Cheng 陈成
M4	Mulan zhi jingguo yinghao 木兰之巾帼英豪 (Mulan the Heroine)	Lin Yi 林毅
M5	Hua Mulan zhi damo yingjiu 花木兰之大漠营救 (Mulan Legend)	He Jianan 何佳男

Objectives

1. **What is the prevailing discourse in 2020 adaptations?**
2. **If and how did Walt Disney's versions influence the plotlines?**
3. **The homecoming motif and the unveiling of Mulan's disguise**

Narrative directions

I identified three narrative directions the films took:

1. Return to *The Ballad of Mulan* (木兰辞 *Mulan ci*) interpretation, where Mulan's family is central (in versions M1 and M2).
→ Loyalty to the family **M2**
2. Highlight the self-realization of the protagonist, which was implemented in the narrative after the legend migrated to the West (in versions M1 and M2).
→ Loyalty to herself **M1**
3. Emphasize the narrative's militarization, which became prevalent in the first half of the twentieth century. In 2020, however, the militarization of the story deepens.
→ Loyalty to the state **M3, M4, M5**

Mulan: heng kong chu shi
 木兰：横空出世 (2020)

Disney's influence	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
Fairy tale genre	X				
Desire for self-realization	X	X			
Failure to fit into gender roles	X	X	X		
Secret departure from home		X	X		
Revealing Mulan's secret before returning home	X	X	X	X	X

„adds more layers onto this crosscultural palimpsest.“
 (Dong 7)



KUNG FU
 MULAN

The Motif of Mulan's Homecoming

Why is the homecoming motif relevant?

- *The Ballad of Mulan* is mainly a story of “*returning home.*” This “*domestication*” is embedded even in later renditions. (Allen 346)
- *The Ballad of Mulan* dedicates “*most of its space to exploring the misery of family separation*” and culminates with a “*joyful family reunion.*” (Edwards 21)

However, in 2020, the Homecoming scene occurs only in M2. The importance of the family is radically reduced.

M1: Mulan chooses to follow her heart and childhood dream.

M2: Mulan returns home. Separation anxiety ends. Possible marriage → continuation of family.

M3, M4, M5: The story culminates with the battle and the establishment of peace. Emphasize Mulan being a soldier. The family extends to fellow soldiers and all civilians.

M3 and M5: Focus on military cards of dead soldiers → Homecoming motif shifts from the return of an individual to the return of fallen soldiers.

The Unveiling of Mulan's disguise

The Homecoming motif in *The Ballad of Mulan* is linked to Mulan changing back into women's clothes and unveiling her disguise.

In all 2020 retellings, the revelation of Mulan's secret occurs before her return home and has various uses in the story.

M1: Development of the romantic relationship and uncovering Mulan's motivation.

M2: Uncovering Mulan's motivation.

M3: Uncovering Mulan's motivation and encouraging fellow soldiers → military purpose.

M4: Motivates the Princess → helps stop the conflict.

M5: The significance of the revelation diminished: "*I might be a woman, but I am also a soldier.*" (我虽是女子却也是战士) Later, it was used in a military ruse → military purpose.

Conclusion

- The Walt Disney's film *Mulan* (1998) influenced plots in all analyzed adaptations. The adaptations with a stronger inclination towards state nationalism saw a decline in utilizing these traits.
- Three directions – loyalty to the family, loyalty to herself, and loyalty to the state.
- Prevailing discourse – the loyalty to the state.
- The militarization of the narrative deepens and slowly changes the character of the legend.
- Shift from daughter to soldier.

Thank You for Your Attention!

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- *Hua Mulan* 花木兰. Directed by Ma Jingle 馬楚成, Starling International Media Group, 2009.
- *Hua Mulan* 花木兰. Directed by Li Yuxi 李雨夕, Zhenle Media and Tianyu Media, 2020.
- *Hua Mulan* 花木兰. Directed by Liu Guoxian 刘国权 and Xinshi Zhang 张辛实, Changchun Film Studio, 1956.
- *Mulan congjun* 木蘭從軍. Directed by Bu Wancang 卜万苍, 1939.
- *Mulan II*. Directed by Darrell Rooney and Lynne Southerland, Walt Disney Home Entertainment, 2004.
- *Mulan zhi jingguo yinghao* 木兰之巾帼英豪. Directed by Lin Yi 林毅, 2020.
- *Mulan*. Directed by Barry Cook and Tony Bancroft, Walt Disney Pictures and Walt Disney Feature Animation, 1998.
- *Mulan*. Directed by Niki Caro, Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2020.
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- *Wu shuang Hua Mulan* 无双花木兰. Directed by Chen Cheng 陈成, New Studio Media, 2020.