

Chinese Classical Poetry – Ballad of Mulan

The Ballad of Mulan is a long narrative folk song, which spread across the north during the Southern and Northern Dynasties Period (420 - 589) in China; it is a representative work of “Yuefu Folksongs” in the Northern Dynasty. Together with “The Peacock Flies Southeast”, they are called “The Two Jades of Yuefu Folksongs” in the history of Chinese Literature.

“Yuefu” is a state bureau that is in charge of music in ancient time; “Yuefu Folksongs” means the folk ballads collected by “Yuefu”.

The Ballad of Mulan is also known as the Poem of Mulan, through narrating the story of Mulan who disguised herself as a man to march into battle in place of her father, the glorious heroine image of Mulan was portrayed. It is a collective creation compiled by the folks, during the long spreading process, it may have been fabricated and polished by other writers, yet it remained the unique character of folksongs.

This stamp theme “Chinese Classical Poetry – Ballad of Mulan” issued by Macao Post includes four stamps and one souvenir sheet.

Mulan decides to replace his father in the army

The young lady Mulan usually diligently weaves cloths at home, and she shows filial respect to her parents. When the country was in danger and foreign enemies invaded her homeland, her father was too old and her brother was too young to enlist in the military, Mulan thus resolutely disguised herself as a man to join the army instead of her father, and set out on her journey.

A heroine in the war

Mulan has bought a fine steed and long whip, “She takes leave of her parents at dawn, and camps beside the Yellow River at night”; “She rides ten thousand miles for military actions, and crosses various fortresses and mountains as if flying”. After ten years of expedition and being through all the hardships, she finally achieved brilliant military goals with her intelligence and wisdom.

Refusing the honours and returning home

Mulan has made outstanding achievement in her military service, she politely refused the reward of high official post and generous salaries offered by the imperial court, “I have no need for the high official post; I wish to borrow a swift horse that can run thousand miles to take me back to hometown”. “Her parents hear their girl returns, they run out of the city to welcome her back. When the elder sister hears her sister returns, she applies splendid makeup by the window. When the little brother hears his sister returns, he sharpens his knife for the pigs and lambs.” The whole family have a reunion with full of joy under a peaceful atmosphere, and this is the ideal state that Mulan pursues.

Revelation of the heroine identity

“I take off my battle clothes, and put on my old garments; I tidy up my beautiful hair by the window, and put on the face ornaments by the mirror.” When Mulan dressed up as a lady again to meet her fellow soldiers of the past, they were all surprised and astounded. “We travelled together for twelve years, and yet we did not realize Mulan was a lady!” Mulan humorously replied, “The male rabbit always bounds from place to place, while the female rabbit always looks with squinting eyes. But when the two rabbits run alongside each other, how can one tell if it is the female or the male?” This displays the elegant manner of ‘Women are no inferior to Men’.

Souvenir Sheet “Ballad of Mulan”

The life story of Mulan, a bright and brave heroine portrayed in the Ballad of Mulan, has lasted throughout all ages. After being constantly passed on and polished by scholars in the past dynasties, various literary styles such as poetries and dramas emerged. The Ballad of Mulan first appeared in “The Musical Records of Old and New” composed by the monk Zhijiang during the Southern Chen Dynasty, but he proclaimed that “Mulan has no name”, which explicitly reveals that he deems “Mulan” as her surname. However, in the “Shuyiji” composed by Zu Chongzhi, the mathematician of Southern and Northern Dynasties, it mentions that the surname of Mulan is “Hua”. Xu Wei, the writer in Ming Dynasty, revised the Ballad of Mulan as “The Heroine Mulan Goes to War in Her Father’s Place”. It says in the story that “My surname is Hua and my name is Mulan”, “I have been living in Wei county of Hebei; my father is named Hu”. After that, the name of Hua Mulan became very famous in China and was widespread both at home and abroad.

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