

ANONYMOUS

Mu Lan Joins the Army (1903)^I

Part I

Drafting Troops

Mocking Elder Brother

Taking Leave of One's Parents

Setting Out for the Border

Characters:

ZHAO JING, performed by supporting *jing*

MU LAN'S FATHER, performed by old *sheng*

MU LAN'S MOTHER, performed by old *dan*

MU LAN, performed by *dan*

MU LAN'S YOUNGER SISTER, performed by additional *dan*

MU SHU, performed by little *chou*

^I The translation is based on A Ying, 1959, pp. 294–303.

(Zhao Jing enters in military dress, whipping his horse and holding a flag of command)

ZHAO JING:

(Prelude couplet)

Executing the orders of the imperial court;
Drafting troops throughout the wide world.

(Speaks:) I am Zhao Jing, an officer under the command of General Huo, the great marshal before the throne of the Son of Heaven of the Great Han. At the order of the imperial court I am widely drafting men for the army. On my mission I have used the pretext of requiring one adult male from every household. These common people, who all fear death, beseech me to do them a favor, so I have received quite some bribes. I have now arrived in Dingtao County. In this county, I've learned, lives a rich man of modest means, who has achieved his wealth by diligence and thrift. He has only one daughter, who is called Mu Lan. She is bewitchingly beautiful, and she has no brother who can join the army for its northern campaign. I'll have to use once again the pretext of requiring one adult male from every household and extract a few more bribes. *(Acts out nodding his head and smiling to himself)* Let me apply the whip to this horse, and I'll be off! *(Acts out whipping his horse and circling the stage)* *(Exits)*

(Mu Lan's father and Mu Lan's mother enter with Mu Lan, in simple costume, and Mu Lan's younger sister, with hanging bangs and gaudily dressed)

(Prelude couplet)

MU LAN'S FATHER: Into old age I've been a commoner in the countryside.

MU LAN'S MOTHER: The whole family happily manifests Heaven's norms.

(Mu Lan's father and Mu Lan's mother act out sitting down together) *(Mu Lan and Mu Lan's younger sister act out paying their respects)*

MU LAN'S MOTHER: Sit down by our side! *(Mu Lan and Mu Lan's younger sister act out sitting down)*

MU LAN'S FATHER: My children, your cousin Boshi has not come home these last few days, and I have no idea where he may be hanging out. These last few days my eyes, I felt, were seeing better, but my heart is truly filled with worries. Just think, my strength is diminishing day by day, and my energy is less and less with every day. If something untoward should happen to me, I have no idea what kind of suffering might be the fate of you two girls.

MU LAN: Daddy, don't worry! Cousin Boshi may be idly loafing about now that he is still young, but I believe he is a real man full of enthusiasm and fervor. As long as you, dear Father, don't forget that he is our closest relative and instruct him in a stern, fatherly way, he is bound to turn out all right in the future!

MU LAN'S FATHER: My child, you are mistaken! (*Sings:*)

A true man is characterized by his noble courage:
What he says while seated he'll execute in action.
Since ancient times trouble comes from empty talk;
Without serious study nobody later turns out right.

MU LAN: Dear Father! (*Sings:*)

The nature of a young man is not yet established:
Once he drops the butcher's knife, he's a Buddha.
If you teach and instruct him in a fatherly way,
All of a sudden the blunt iron will turn into gold!

(*Mu Shu enters in military garb*)

(*Prelude couplet*)

I'm sneaking away from places of song and dance;
Washing my eyes by banks of streams and clouds.

(*Speaks:*) I am Mu Shu, and my style is Boshi.² As a child I lost both my parents, and growing up I have loved the martial arts. With my roaming knight-errant friends we form bands and gangs, and when discussing the situation of the world, we blame Heaven and Earth. I have been raised by my uncle, but today I have almost turned twenty. It's too bad that my uncle is such a tightfisted old scrooge. He doesn't have any son of his own, but he is unwilling to let me freely spend his money—I have no idea why this old guy without a son is holding on to his money! This morning I heard people in the marketplace tell that the empire is drafting soldiers to go on a northern campaign and fight the bandits. But

² Upper-class men in traditional China would have at least two names. They received their personal name (*ming*) soon after birth; this name they would often use for self-designation. Upon reaching adulthood, they would choose their adult name or style (*zi*), which would be used by others when addressing them. Mentioning both personal name and style is a common element in self-introductions.

I eat my own rice,³ so why should I make any effort on behalf of the state? I'd better sneak away and hide myself for a while at home and then later make new plans. While talking I have already arrived at the gate of our house. (*Acts out entering the gate*) (*Acts out greeting*) (*Speaks:*) Uncle and Aunt, please accept my best wishes.

MU LAN'S FATHER and MU LAN'S MOTHER: Dear son, you've come home!

MU LAN: (*rises, and speaks:*) Cousin Boshi, you have come home! That's great, because my parents were concerned about you. (*Acts out greeting*)

MU LAN'S FATHER: My son Boshi! (*Sings:*)

Ever since you left home, we never received any news,
And as a result, we were constantly thinking about you.
We were afraid you might suffer from hunger and cold—
White-haired and waiting, we were filled with anxiety!
From now on you should tame your unbridled mind,
And make sure to glorify your parents by making a name.
A man's achievement all depends on his personal efforts;
If you don't put in the effort, how can you achieve fame?

MU LAN: Cousin! (*Sings:*)

My dear elder brother, now please attentively listen to me.
You have to take your closest relatives into consideration!
Alas, our father and mother are now in a desperate situation,
And they have no other son whom they can call their own.
All-under-heaven is in turmoil, and no region is pacified—
You should make every effort to make your plans quickly.
You're a man in the strength of his years, filled with vigor:
If you do not grab this opportunity, you will never succeed.

(*The military officer Zhao Jing, carrying the flag of command, enters*)

ZHAO JING: Here I have arrived outside the gate of Mu Lan. Let me give them a scare! (*Roars like the Gorges:*) Anybody inside?

(*Mu Lan's father and Mu Lan's mother act out being frightened*) (*Mu Shu acts out being so scared that he falls to the ground*)

³ In other words, I have never received an appointment or a salary from the state, so there is no obligation for me to repay any favor shown to me by the state.

(Mu Lan and Mu Lan's younger sister act out being flustered; they speak to Mu Shu and Mu Lan's father)

MU LAN: Daddy, there is someone at the door calling for you.

(Mu Lan's father acts out holding his staff with shaking hands and greeting the officer, but being unable to speak) (Zhao Jing enters, and Mu Lan and Mu Lan's younger sister act out avoiding him [by leaving])

ZHAO JING: At the order of His Majesty the Emperor I have come to your district to draft adult males. If you have any son or cousin who will join the army, quickly report his name!

MU LAN'S FATHER: *(replying in a quaking voice:)* Yes, yes! I have one full nephew named Mu Shu.

MU SHU: *(on the ground replying in a panic:)* I'm not, not, not his nephew, I won't go!

ZHAO JING: Tell him to report for duty at our garrison tomorrow in the third quarter of the hour of noon. If he tries to flee or to hide himself, this will mean you will have transgressed military law, and I will have you, old fart, arrested and beheaded!

MU LAN'S FATHER: *(replying in a quaking voice:)* Yes, yes!

ZHAO JING: *(leaving the house and acting out being surprised)* I had clearly been informed that Mu Lan had no elder brother, so where did she find this cousin? Let's wait till tomorrow at the barracks and question him once again. *(Exits)*

(Mu Lan's father acts out wiping away his tears. Mu Lan's mother, Mu Lan, and Mu Lan's younger sister act out appearing again and act out helping Mu Shu to his feet.)

MU LAN'S FATHER: Dear Boshi! *(Sings:)*

He calls out: My dear Boshi, you now listen to my order!
This is your opportunity to go out and to have a career.
If you now go out and exterminate all those barbarians,
You'll be ennobled as a marquis with a hundred towns!

(Speaks:) My son, this is your lucky moment! Quickly get ready for your departure, and don't miss out on this chance to establish merit. My only wish is that you will leave early and return soon, so we, these old people, may witness your glory! *(Sings:)*

Dear Boshi, quickly set out on your many-day journey!
 Throughout your life you've said you have the abilities.
 Right now it's the moment to display your statesmanship,
 And I want you to go out and make a determined effort,
 So history books for all eternity will transmit your fame.

MU SHU: Dear Uncle! (*Sings:*)

He addressed him as dear uncle, please let me explain,
 I am only a little student of books, so young of years!
 You can't believe the empty words of my earlier days—
 Why do you want me to be a soldier and join the army?
 In case I would lose my life out there on the battlefield,
 You'd be bereft of the only person who can be your heir.

Dear Uncle! (*Acts out weeping*) Dear Uncle,

You, you, you have to come up with some secret scheme,
 Because I desperately cling to this miserable life of mine.
 Please go and bribe that officer, and ask him for his mercy;
 Give him some gold and silver so he will go on his way!

MU LAN'S FATHER: (*acting out turning toward Mu Lan and pointing*) Now what?
 I knew all along that he would turn out to be a good-for-nothing. (*Acts out wiping away his tears*)

MU LAN: Cousin Boshi! (*Sings to the rapid beat:*)

Your little sister has something she wants to say to you;
 Please listen attentively, and don't be secretly annoyed.
 Since ancient times great heroes, Chinese and foreign,
 All have been willing to risk their life for their country.
 How come you are such a weakling and good-for-nothing,
 Who clings to life afraid of death, making people laugh?
 They'll say you're just a big straw bag, big but of no use!
 It's too bad that I am still only so very young indeed,
 And that on top of that I was born as a beautiful girl.
 If in my current existence I had only been born as a boy,

MU SHU: Then what? (*Mu Lan resumes singing:*)

I would grasp in my hands a lance or a spear,
 I would hang at my waist a bow and a sword,

And all alone on a single horse beyond Yangguan,⁴
Kill off those barbarians so none was left to flee!

MU SHU: Little Sister, don't brag. You're a girl, so what do you know about the sufferings of the battlefield? (*Sings to the rapid beat:*)

Dear little sister, now please don't be upset at me,
Please keep your mouth shut and don't blabber on.
If you'd raise your sword,

 Spur on your horse,
 And arrive at the border,

Your soul, too,
 Immediately would fly off
 To beyond the ninth heaven.

If I indeed am afraid to die and make people laugh,
Why don't you
 In my place
 Join the army and put on armor?

MU LAN: (*singing to the rapid beat:*)

Dear elder brother, there's no need to mock me now:
Since ancient times there have been female generals.
I definitely want to report my name at the garrison,
And with raised sword assist Commander in Chief Huo!

MU LAN'S MOTHER: My child, you are a girl, so how can you go?

MU LAN: I definitely can go. I have always wanted to join the army and shame those men. (*Acts out kneeling down and taking her leave*)

(*Mu Lan's father and Mu Lan's mother act out weeping*) (*Mu Lan and Mu Shu act out exchanging clothes*)

MU LAN:

In front of the hall I take leave of my father and mother,
And I take leave of my elder brother and younger sister.

⁴ Yangguan is the name of a border station on the western edge of Gansu. It was immortalized in a popular parting song by Wang Wei (d. 761).

(Acts out taking leave of Mu Shu and Mu Lan's younger sister) (Mu Shu acts out imitating female gait and dress)

MU LAN:

I have something to say that I want to impress on you:
Elder brother and younger sister should live in harmony.

Elder Brother, from now on you must learn to behave,
Don't go and join your old cronies for all kinds of mischief.
When I go and establish major merit on Rouge Ridge,
It will be you, Elder Brother, who'll enjoy that great fame.

I will in final analysis remain a woman, so in my thoughts
I will always be at home, filially serving my two parents.
Constantly, morning and evening, make sure they are fine,
And comfort our parents whenever they are depressed.

If I will be lucky enough to survive and come back home,
I will once again express my feelings over our separation.
At this moment I cannot fully express my heart's feelings,
As I am about to leave for the army to report my name.

(Mu Lan acts out weeping as she leaves, acts out walking, acts out turning around to look, and exits) (Mu Lan's father, Mu Lan's mother, and Mu Lan's younger sister act out waving their hands)

MU SHU: She is gone. What are you still standing here for? *(Pulls Mu Lan's father and Mu Lan's mother away)*

MU LAN'S YOUNGER SISTER: Slowly, Cousin Boshi! Slowly! Listen to what I have to say! *(Sings:)*

When a man lacks all shame he is truly despicable:
You truly are just a silverlike wax-headed spear!⁵
Hearing about barbarians, you retract your head,⁶
Unwilling to shed your blood on the battlefield.

Dear brother Boshi,

It's not that I, your little sister, am mocking you,
But from now on I wouldn't go and brag anymore.

⁵ A "silverlike, wax-headed spear" may look very pretty but is of no use on the battlefield.

⁶ That is, you act like a turtle. "Turtle" was a common curse word meaning "pimp" or "cuckold."

You said you were filled with hatred for the enemy,
But I see your courage is less than that of a pig or dog,
It doesn't measure up to that of one single beautiful girl.

(Acts out mocking Mu Shu by pulling a face at him)

MU LAN'S FATHER and MULAN'S MOTHER: Little girl, this is just the way he is, so don't mock him. Let's go inside. *(Exeunt)*

Part II

The Lost Battle

The Victory Celebration

The Court Audience

The Glorious Return

Characters:

MU LAN, performed by *dan*

HUO QUBING, performed by (old) *sheng*

ZHAO JING, performed by supporting *jing*

GUARDS, performed by extras

KHAN, performed by *jing*

BARBARIANS, performed by extras

WEI QING, performed by young *sheng*

HAN SOLDIERS, performed by extras

A BARBARIAN SPY, performed by *chou*

EUNUCHS, performed by extras

EMPEROR, performed by *jing*

(*Mu Lan changed into male costume, in military dress, with a bow and arrows on her back, a sword at her side, and carrying a lance*)

MU LAN:

(*Prelude couplet*)

Cheeks like lotus flowers and a waist like a willow:
While a helmet covers my head I brandish a sword.

(*Speaks:*) I am Mu Lan, and I am determined to join the army in place of my father⁷ and to establish merit beyond the border by exterminating the caitiffs. Since I have taken leave of my parents, I am on my way to the garrison to report for duty. Who could have thought that I as a girl would have such a great opportunity today!

(*Sings to the slow beat as the suona⁸ is played backstage:*)

Storm-driven dust
 Extends to the Central Plain,
 An endless expanse of yellow sand;
The breath of death is rising,
 Spreading east, west, north, south,
 To the very edges of the earth.
Who could have foreseen
 That the written order to serve
 Would drop down in front of my embroidery window?
It promptly filled me,
 This female hero,
 With an all-overpowering, towering rage!
At the shortest moment
 I had taken my leave
 Of my white-haired aged parents.
I've abandoned
 My inner-chamber companions,
 Who do embroidery and pick their flowers;

⁷ Curiously, in Part I the imperial emissary Zhao Jing never claims that Mu Lan's father has to serve!

⁸ For a description of the *suona*, see Wichmann, 1991, p. 232.

I've abandoned
 The application of rouge and powder,
 The burned incense and fragrant musk;
 I've abandoned
 The singing shirt and dancing sleeves,
 And the lute with its many strings.
 I've come to compete in
 Ascending the terrace with raised sword,⁹
 Lifting the lance and grabbing a horse;
 I've come to see
 The forest of spears and trees of sabers,
 And people killed in great numbers.
 I've come to compete in
 The number of heads of slain fighters,
 For the reputation of being a man;
 I've come to hear
 The rustling poplars of the border lands,
 And the barbarian reed pipe of the steppe.
 Just look at me
 As I look around, filled with confidence,
 Raising winds and clouds by my roar;
 Just look at me
 As I earn merit, achieve noble rank,
 And establish a mansion with rows of banners;
 Just look at me
 As I will lead the captured barbarians
 To bow down at the emperor's feet!
 (*Speaks:*) On this journey . . . (*Sings:*)
 I definitely will
 Slaughter the dragon with my bare hands,
 And achieve merit in this acrobatic performance,
 But who will know
 That I am one
 As light as a swallow,
 As beautiful as a flower!

⁹ In order to emphasize the importance of the occasion, Liu Bang appointed Han Xin as his commander in chief on a raised terrace.

(*Speaks:*) I am so elated! (*Twirls her lance and exits*)

(*Huo Qubing, with a red face and white beard, dressed as commander, enters with guards and the officer Zhao Jing*)

HUO QUBING:

(*Prelude couplet*)

A general in the field, a chancellor at court:
My painted portrait is seen in Unicorn Hall.

(*While music is played backstage, he acts out ascending the commander's seat. Speaks:*)

In the Han camp the great flag and pointed banners are arrayed;
Ennobled to the highest rank I command the walls of the border.
When I as general issue an order, even the mountains make haste;
In one movement I clear away all alarms to celebrate "Great Peace."

I am the commander in chief of the Great Han, Huo Qubing. I have received the order of the imperial palace for a punitive campaign against the Xiongnu, and I am currently drafting troops and buying horses in order to link up with the advance troops. Soldiers! Hang out the poster, and if there are persons who want to volunteer, quickly report their names.

(*Mu Lan enters in military dress and whipping her horse. Acts out descending from horse.*)

MU LAN:

(*Prelude couplet*)

Setting out on my trip to the battlefield,
I risk my life for the sake of the country.

(*Speaks:*) Anyone here at the gate? I have come to join the army.

ZHAO JING: (*acts out coming out and greeting her*) There you are! Report at the gate and enter!

MU LAN: (*acts out bowing*) Mu Shu reports for duty and enters.

(*The guards act out shouting in a threatening manner*) (*Mu Lan glances [left and] right, acts out assuming a respectful position*)

THE GUARDS: Commander in Chief, a young fighter outside wants to join the army and requests an audience.

HUO QUBING: Tell him to come in. (*Mu Lan acts out entering*) (*Huo Qubing gets on his feet and acts out observing her carefully. Acts out surprise.*)

HUO QUBING: You're such a handsome young man—you look just like a tender girl. What kind of courage and schemes do you have that you dare appear here before me, making light of a thousand trials? Soldiers, chase him away!

MU LAN: Just wait! (*Sings to the lead-in beat:*)

Commander in Chief, please sit down in your tiger tent,
And listen while I, Mu Shu, tell you a comparable case.
In earlier days, Chu and Han had many great generals,
But none measured up to that young man Zhang Zifang.¹⁰

To this very day his portrait is seen in Lingyan Tower,
His face as handsome as that of some flowerlike maiden.
In commanding troops, all depends on tactics and strategy,
So how can one judge a person on the basis of his looks?

How can one rashly judge the world's greatest heroes?
Please do not wrongly reject me, this young man Mu!

HUO QUBING: What capabilities do you have that you dare brag in such a manner?

MU LAN: Please listen. (*Sings as above:*)

You, General, are one of the pillars and beams of the state;
You will have your own considerations, your own ideas.
The Xiongnu basically are the leaders of nomadic tribes,
But for a long time they have troubled China on its borders.

If we do not completely clean out their nests and burrows,
There never will be an end to the problems they may cause.
I, Mu Shu, consider myself a commander who can lead—
Unless I behead the king of Loulan, I will not return home.¹¹

¹⁰ Following the collapse of the Qin dynasty upon the death of the First Emperor, a civil war broke out among different contenders for the throne. The two final contenders were the hegemon-king of Western Chu, Xiang Yu, and the king of Han, Liu Bang. Eventually, Xiang Yu was defeated by Liu Bang, who was able to rely on the advice of many fine generals. His most important adviser was Zhang Liang (Zifang).

¹¹ Loulan was the name of a small kingdom in Central Asia in the second century B.C.E. that repeatedly fought off Han conquest.

HUO QUBING: Mu Shu, don't talk such nonsense! I will appoint you as a cavalry vanguard commander to test your capabilities. Mu Shu, listen to my orders. I order you to lead five hundred mounted soldiers and link up with Generalissimo Wei. In case of any failure or mistake, you will be punished according to military law.

MU LAN: Yes, sir!

HUO QUBING: All dismissed! (*All exeunt*)

(*Mu Lan enters, costumed as a soldier, together with four mounted soldiers*)

MU LAN:

(*Prelude couplet*)

Once I have the power to command,
I will give my orders to the many troops.

(*Speaks:*) I am Mu Shu. I have received the order of General Huo to cross the border for war and to link up with Generalissimo Wei. Officers! Our troops will depart for the steppe.

(*Backstage, music is played. Extras bring lance and horse, and Mu Lan acts out mounting the horse.*) (*They circle the stage three times, and exeunt*)

(*Extras enter again and line up sideways at the edge of the stage*) (*Mu Lan enters*)

MU LAN: What is the name of this place where we have arrived?

EXTRAS: This is the Bend of the River.

MU LAN: Then let's pitch camp right here. (*Extras shout "Yes, sir" and retire. Exeunt.*)

(*Mu Lan enters wrapped in a feather cloak, with extra holding a candle*) (*Acts out entering the tent*) (*Mu Lan holds the candle and looks all around. Extra exits unobtrusively. Mu Lan acts out rubbing her eyes and sleeping, acts out being startled awake, acts out heaving a sigh.*) (*Sings, to the level beat of flute and fife backstage:*)

Ah, who could have known

That fate would be against us,

That our country is suffering decay!

Unfeeling

I have abandoned

My white-haired aged parents.

Removing hairpins and bracelets,

I've changed my dainty dress,
Assuming the likeness of a man.
Alas, there was no one else
To take my father's place
And serve the country at the border.
For this reason,
I carry lance and spear
To give battle in front of the troops.
Leading these
Five hundred men,
I'll establish my fame on the steppe.

(Acts out sleeping. Acts out being startled awake. Acts out heaving a sigh.)

MU LAN: Just listen to the mighty flow of the Yellow River! How it startles my mind and moves my soul! *(Sings, to the level beat of flute and fife:)*

I hear the river's flow,
Descending from heaven,
And flowing toward my home village.
In dreams of my home village
It still seems as if
I am in my embroidery room:
Carrying plate and basin,
Testing the water's temperature,
I am waiting on my father and mother
With pleasant mien and fragrant dishes;
With Little Sister
I play by the balustrade,
Or buy flowers for my hair in the quiet alley.

(Acts out sleeping. Acts out being startled awake. Acts out heaving a sigh.)

MU LAN: This is an unprecedented joy for a woman, so why am I so sad and depressed? *(Sings, to the level beat of flute and fife:)*

If I can with
The strength of my arms
Capture the bandits, capture their king,
I will be able
To command a large army,
Dispatch troops and order the generals.

That will be for our
 World of women
 A first-time, fully unprecedented event,
 And it will teach that
 Crowd of blushing stalwarts
 To deeply bow down before my toilette table.

(Acts out getting up)

MU LAN: Officers and men, where are you? *(Extras as mounted soldiers enter from left and right)* The sky is already bright, so let's break up camp and move on to link up with Generalissimo Wei. *(Exeunt)*

(The khan of the Xiongnu¹² and barbarians. Wei Qing and Han soldiers. The two parties engage in a fierce battle. They fight three times for three rounds. Wei Qing is defeated. Exeunt.)

(The key to the whole play is found in this scene, so not the slightest slackening is allowed!)

(Mu Lan enters in a white coat and holding a lance)

MU LAN: Here we have arrived at the foot of Mt. Rouge, so let me climb to a high spot so I can have a good look, to see where our General Wei is killing those rebels. *(Mu Lan acts out ascending the mountain and standing atop a high terrace. Backstage, the sounds of battle are produced. Mu Lan acts out being startled.)* In the distance, where dust is rising, I see defeated soldiers coming down, [like locusts] darkening the sky! Those must be the Xiongnu who flee in defeat. So let's go and fight them, so they will be attacked from both sides!

(Wei Qing enters, fleeing in defeat, followed by the khan, who hotly pursues him. Wei Qing acts out giving battle and being defeated. Exeunt.)

MU LAN: That's, that's, that's not good! How it is possible that we Han people are defeated by the barbarians? Let me advance and save General Wei! *(Acts out descending from the terrace) (Sings while music is played backstage:)*

Wait till I, this little Mu Lan, throttle those barbarians—
 In a moment I will trample this steppe completely flat!
 Don't mock me for being only a weak and tender girl—
 Just watch me splattering this battle gown with blood!

(Wei Qing enters, defeated. The khan pursues him, acts out fighting him. Mu Lan enters unobtrusively, acts out blocking and fighting the khan.) (The khan orders the extras to fight Mu Lan

¹² Historically, the highest ruler of the Xiongnu was not designated "khan" or *kehan*, but *shanyu*.

from all sides. Mu Lan fiercely fights the khan in a man-to-man confrontation. The khan acts out being defeated and exits.) (Wei Qing turns around and comes out, and acts out expressing his gratitude to Mu Lan)

WEI QING: Who may you be, General, who just arrived? Allow me to express my gratitude for saving me.

MU LAN: I am Mu Shu of the cavalry vanguard under the command of General Huo. General, please pardon my crime of being late in linking up with you.

WEI QING: General, many thanks for saving me. Now please lend me a hand in exterminating these barbarians.

MU LAN: Yes, sir! I will immediately fight my way into their camp!

(Wei Qing and Mu Lan twirl their lances. Exeunt.)

(The khan enters, leading his barbarian soldiers)

THE KHAN: My children, you have seen how terrible these two *manzi* were.¹³ They gave me such a beating that I couldn't get in a stroke, so what should we do now?

A SPY: The enemy troops have already arrived!

ALL: Check the situation out once again!

THE KHAN: In front of us there is nowhere we can go, and behind us the enemy comes in hot pursuit, so where can we flee for safety?

ALL: Let's fight them one more time to see who will be victorious in the end!

THE KHAN: So let's fight! Fight!

(Wei Qing and Mu Lan enter together. They engage in battle [with the Xiongnu] for a few rounds. [The Xiongnu] are defeated and exeunt.)

MU LAN: Where have we arrived?

WEI QING: We have already arrived in foreign territory.

MU LAN: General, we cannot slacken in our efforts. Let's pursue them closely and kill them till no single piece of armor is left!

¹³ *Manzi* is a common derogatory term used by northerners for southerners. It may be used by northern Chinese to refer to southern Chinese in a rude manner. Here it is used by the Xiongnu to denigrate the Chinese.

WEI QING: You are right!

MU LAN: Please.

(Together they twirl their lances and exeunt)

(The khan enters leading his defeated troops) (On the backdrop are displayed the signs of ocean waves)

THE KHAN: My children, this place here is the Northern Ice Sea, so where can we hide ourselves?

ALL: We can hide ourselves on the icebergs for a while.

THE KHAN: At this moment we have no other solution, so let's cross the ice.

(Act out stumbling and falling down on the slippery ice, and running away in order to escape)
(Exeunt)

(Backstage, the war drums are sounded) (Wei Qing and Mu Lan enter in pursuit)

MU LAN: Where have we come now? How come we don't see even a single shadow of a barbarian?

WEI QING: We have arrived at the Northern Ice Sea. The barbarians must have been beheaded and killed to the last man by the Han troops, so I would propose to you, General, that we return with our troops and report to the throne.

MU LAN: I'm overjoyed! *(Sings to the level beat:)*

My teaming up with you, my general,
 Resembled the wind following the tiger,
 The dragon following the clouds,
 As together we went to the borders and secured the state.
Just look, from now on the cosmos is at peace,
And a unified globe now celebrates Great Peace.

WEI QING: Congratulations!

(All act out shouting in support) (Wei Qing and Mu Lan twirl their lances. Exeunt.)
(Eunuchs and Emperor Wu of the Han enter)

EMPEROR:

(Prelude couplet)

To seek revenge and wash away shame
Is the old ambition of a man of the Han.

(Speaks:)

Within the phoenix walls colored clouds rise above towers and pavilions;
Shrubs and trees are always in bloom, and both sun and moon are at ease.
The myriad countries, each in their costume, line up before the throne,
As the Son of Heaven of the house of Han rules the rivers and mountains.

We are Liu Che, the emperor of the Han dynasty. To Our distress the Xiongnu have for years on end been troubling the Central Plain. Repeatedly We sought to establish peace through interdynastic marriages, but that did not in the least assuage the later problems. That's why the whole world shared in Our rage. We ordered generals to lead Our army on an extermination campaign against these barbarians to seek revenge for the people of the Han and wash away their shame. Eunuchs, transmit Our orders: if any report arrives from the borders, inform Us immediately!

(Huo Qubing, with a red face and white beard, enters, holding his court tablet)

HUO QUBING:

(Prelude couplet)

Red banners recently reported victory,
So I will thus inform my lord and ruler.

(Acts out entering the throne hall) *(Speaks:)* This old servant Huo Qubing reports to Your Majesty: with the assistance of the valorous general Mu Shu, Wei Qing recently annihilated the Xiongnu. These generals have returned to court and request an audience.

EMPEROR: This is all thanks to your efforts as a chancellor. Let it be known that We will see Wei Qing and Mu Shu, so We may reward and ennoble them.

(Wei Qing and Mu Lan enter while performing the dance of obeisance. They act out entering the throne hall and kneeling down.)

EMPEROR: Please rise! You two have great merit in exterminating the caitiffs. Please report your glorious achievements in detail.

(Music is performed backstage. Wei Qing presents the register of meritorious achievements. The emperor acts out reading it.)

EMPEROR: Mu Shu has such great merits that he may be ennobled as a Marquis Within the Passes. Let him accept this reward and retire.

MU LAN: Please allow me a few words. (*Sings:*)
Your servant originally is
 Only a common citizen
 From the rustic countryside,
But to wield shield and lance
 In defense of Altar and Grain¹⁴
 Is the responsibility of a subject.
To exterminate the barbarians,
 And protect race and kind,
 Was the basic ideal of your servant;
I did not act on behalf of
 The Son of Heaven of the Han
 Or the dynasty of the house of Liu.
I did not aim for
 Great riches or high status,
 The ephemeral fortune of a moment;
Nor did I aim for
 My share of the spoils,
 And an idle fame that has no value.
I only request that our
 Sage and enlightened ruler
 Will retract the edict he pronounced,
And, as I lay down my commission,
 He will allow the bones of my body
 To return to my native hills and groves.

EMPEROR: Even if that may be your wish, how could We not properly distribute awards? General Huo and General Wei, please take the cap and girdle for Mu Shu with you.

(*The emperor and extras exeunt*)

HUO QUBING and WEI QING: Our congratulations, Marquis Mu! Tomorrow we will send Your Lordship off to his home village. (*Act out smiling. Exeunt.*)

Translated by Wilt L. Idema

¹⁴ "Altar and Grain" renders the Chinese phrase *she ji*, which refers to the altar to the earth and the god of millet, symbols of the nation.