THE BALLAD OF MULAN – Anonymous

ımızın pinyin ve pinyin (simplifkated Chinese Script) –

(Note: Pinyin to enable entry by ordinary keyboard: 
ji- = first tone, ji’ = second tone, ji^ = third tone, ji` = fourth tone.)

唧唧复唧唧，木兰当户织。
ji- ji- fu’ ji- ji-, mu` lan’ dang- hu’ zhi-
ji ji again ji ji, Mulan in front of door weave 
“Ji ji,” and “ji ji,” Mulan weaves in front of the door.

不闻机杼声，惟闻女叹息。
bu` wen’ ji- zhu’ sheng-, wei’ wen’ nu^ tan’ xi-
not hear machine shuttle noise, only hear daughter sigh--

“Now we don’t hear the loom shuttle; we only hear our daughter sighing.

问女何所思，问女何所忆?
wen’ nu^ he’ suo^ si-, wen’ nu^ he’ suo^ yi-
ask daughter what of think, ask daughter what of remember 
Daughter, what are you thinking about? What are you nostalgic over?”

女亦无所思，女亦无所忆,
u^ yi’ wu’ suo^ si-, nu^ yi’ wu’ suo^ yi-
daughter also none of think, daughter also none of remember 
“I am not thinking about anything, and I am not nostalgic.
Last night I saw the conscription notice; it’s the Khan’s\(^1\) Great Call-up\(^2\).

There are twelve scrolls of army rolls, and every scroll has Father’s name.”

Father has no elder son; I have no big brother.

Let me buy saddle and horse, and go to war in Father’s place.”

In the east market a fine horse is bought; in the west market, a saddle and its skirt;

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\(^1\) “Khan”: “Khan” is a Mongolian and Turkic title for “ruler”. The reason that Mulan’s emperor was called by that term was because Mulan lived under the Northern Wei Dynasty of 386 – 535 C.E., which was ruled by the sinicized but “non-Chinese”, i.e. non-Han, Xian- Bei- (Xianbei) nationality, a formerly steppe horsemen people who originally spoke a language belonging to the Altaic family (the Mongolian, Turkic, and Manchu-Tungustic languages).

\(^2\) This “great call-up” is thought to be part of the Northern Wei Emperor Tai-wu (太武帝)’s series of thirteen campaigns from 424 – 451 C.E against the Rouran, a tribe then ruling present day Inner and Outer Mongolia and thought to be descended from the ancient Turkic Xiongnu.
南市买辔头，北市买长鞭。
nanˇ shíˇ mài^ peˇ tou^ , bei^ shíˇ mài^ chángˇ bianˇ
south market buy bridle - - , north market buy long whip
In the south market, a bridle; in the north market, a long whip.

旦辞爷娘去，暮宿黄河边，
danˋ ciˇ yeˇ niangˇ quˋ , muˇ suˇ huangˇ heˇ bian-
morning leave father mother go, evening sleep Yellow River side
In the morning she says good-bye to her parents; in the evening she sleeps at the side of the Yellow River.

不闻爷娘唤女声，
buˋ wenˇ yeˇ niangˇ huanˇ nuˇ sheng-
not hear father mother call daughter sound
She doesn’t hear the sound of parents calling her,

但闻黄河水声溅溅。
danˋ wenˇ huangˇ heˇ liuˇ shuiˇ sheng^ jian^ jian-
but hear Yellow River flowing water sound “jian” “jian”
But hears the sound of the Yellow River’s water going “jian, jian.”

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3 In Mulan’s march north to join the battle against the enemy to China’s north, she would have to cross the Yellow river, because all three places thought to possibly be Mulan’s home town were all south of the Yellow River (see http://baike.baidu.com/view/4025.htm):

1. Yuˇ Chengˇ (虞城) in northeastern Henan Province, about 110 miles due south of the present day Yellow River. Today a huge Mulan temple built during the Tang Dynasty of 618 – 907 C.E. still stands.

2. Boˇ Zhouˇ (亳州) in northwestern Anhui Province, only 30 miles due south of Yuˇ Chengˇ above. A Mulan temple also stands here.

3. Huangˇ Piˇ (黄陂) in Hunan Province now part of the Greater Changsha City area. This was thought unlikely because this area was not part of the Northern Wei Dynasty’s territory. Proponents of this place being Mulan’s home town, however, argue that Mulan did not live during the Northern Wei Dynasty at all, but under the Tang Dynasty, when all of China was unified. A Mulan temple also dating from the Tang Dynasty still stands.
旦辞黄河去，暮宿黑山头，

morning leave Yellow River go, evening sleep Black Mountain head

In the morning she says good-bye to the Yellow River; in the evening she sleeps on the Black Mountain⁴.

不闻爷娘唤女声，

do-not hear father mother call daughter sound

She doesn’t hear the sound of parents calling her,

但闻燕山胡骑声啾啾。

but hear Yan Mountain barbarian horsemen noise “jiu” “jiu”

But hears the sound of the Yan Mountains’ barbarian horsemen going “jiu, jiu.”

⁴ The Black Mountain or Hei- Shan- (黑山) is thought to be the Bei^ Han^ Mountain (北罕山) in present day Gubalin Right Banner (古巴林右旗) in southeastern Inner Mongolia (see http://baike.baidu.com/view/1183290.htm, paragraph 4). That area, however, is not close to the Yan Mountains (燕山) the horsemen from which Mulan is mentioned in the next verse as hearing.

I think a second possibility explains things better: Black Mountain here refers to the Yin Mountains (阴山), which in Mongolian is called “The Seventeen Black Mountains”. Since the Northern Wei Dynasty is governed by an ethnic group speaking a language related to the Mongols, it’s quite possible that Northern Wei Dynasty people called the Yin Mountains the “Black Mountains”. So Mulan would be at the easternmost of the “Seventeen Black Mountains”, i.e. at the Great Wall around the area of Zhangjiakou (张家口). Here, immediately to Mulan’s east would be the Yan Mountains, and thus she could hear the Yan Mountain horsemen while sleeping at the “Black Mountain”.

The third possibility, that this poem is talking about the present day Black Mountain Head or Heishantou (黑山头) in northeastern Inner Mongolia 600 miles north (straight line only) of the Great Wall at Zhangziakou and on the border with Russia, is not probable. This is too far north, far into the rear of enemy Rouran land, and is far removed from the Yan Mountains.
万里赴戎机，关山度若飞，

For thousands of miles, she goes wherever the battle takes her, crossing passes and mountains as if she flew.

朔气传金柝，寒光照铁衣。

Frigid air transmits the night watch claps; frosty light illumes the iron armor.

将军百战死，壮士十年归。

Generals die after a hundred battles; heroes return after ten years’ time.

归来见天子，天子坐明堂，

They return to see the Son of Heaven, sitting in the Bright Hall.

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5 *Ci Hai* 辞海，1989 ed., Shanghai, p. 1453 under entry “tuo” 『柝』：巡夜者击以报更的梆子 (the clap board that night watchmen hits to announce the hour). It’s interesting here that the clap board is referred to as being a “golden” or metallic one, perhaps yellow copper, as ordinary night watch clap boards are made of wood. Perhaps in the army the night watch clap boards are made of metal?
策勋十二转，赏赐百千强。

The merit scrolls confer twelve promotions, awarded to thousands of strong men.

可汗问所欲，木兰不用尚书郎，

The Khan asks what she wants. “Mulan doesn’t need to be an Imperial Cabinet Official,”

愿借明驼千里足，送儿还故乡。

I’d like a good camel’s thousand-mile hooves, to carry me back home.”

爷娘闻女来，出郭相扶将。

Hearing that Daughter is coming, the parents come outside the city walls, supporting each other.

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6 Op. Cit., p. 1511, under the entry “zhuan” 「转」：迁调官职 (to change official position).

7 Op. Cit., p. 1258, under the entry “shang shu lang” 「尚书郎」：“魏晋以后尚书各曹有 … 官 … 综理政务，通称尚书郎 Since the Wei and Jin Dynasties the various departments of the Imperial Cabinet … have officials … who administer overall affairs and are generally known as shang shu lang。”

Hearing that Little Sister is coming, Big Sister puts on her makeup in front of the door.

Hearing that Big Sister is coming, Little Brother sharpens the knife, eyeing the pig and goat.

“I open up my east bedroom door; I sit on my west bedroom bed.

I take off my wartime clothes; I put on my old times dress.”

At the window she arranges cloud-like hair; facing the mirror she pastes on her yellow forehead ornaments.

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9 Op. cit., p. 1120, under entry “zhuang” 「妆」：妆饰，…如…「…对君洗红妆」 (makeup, as in “… in front of you, sire, I wash off my makeup”).

She comes out to see her comrades; her comrades are all shocked.

“We march together for twelve years, and we don’t know that Mulan is a lady!”

“The male rabbit hops from the beginning; the female rabbit’s eyes are misty;
Both rabbits are running along the ground; how can you tell whether I am male or female?”

\[11\] Op. cit., p. 634, under entry “hua huang” 「花黄」：装饰…以金黄色纸剪成星月花鸟等形贴于额上 … (ornament…pasting on the forehead golden yellow paper cut into the shape of star, moon, flower, or bird…)

\[12\] Op. Cit., p. 1709, under entry “shuo” 「朔」：初始 (at the beginning); 此二句则形容如何辨别雄雌兔 then it’s possible that these two lines describe how to distinguish between male and female rabbits。但亦有可能「扑朔」为拟声辞，形容雄兔走路 but “pu shuo” may also be an onomatopoeia, describing the male rabbit’s run.