

# STORY & FILM BACKGROUND

Since the dawn of recorded history, in every clan, in every culture – from ancient Greece to China, Egypt, the Americas and Polynesia – heroes have embarked on life-altering journeys. One of the most renowned and beloved of these “wandering heroes” is a young woman named Mulan. In Asia, the story of Mulan is as familiar as the story of Cinderella is in Western cultures. The story of this brave Chinese woman has been told for nearly two thousand years, and many believe that Mulan was a real person. In a tradition established by the creators of *The Rescuers Down Under*, the creative team for Disney’s *Mulan* journeyed to China in the summer of 1994 to get a feeling for the grand historical settings and physical topography that would become fundamental to their film. Although there is no proof that Mulan actually existed, almost everyone they met in China felt that she did.



Photo © Disney

Original movie poster for Disney’s *Mulan* (1998)



Photo © Disney

Directors Barry Cook and Tony Bancroft with maquettes and a storyboard

“Everybody in China had a different story,” recalls the film’s co-director Barry Cook. “And everybody we asked about Mulan would say, ‘This is the story of Mulan and this is how it really happened, because she was from my village, and I know.’ She’s from 20 villages. She’s from 20 cities. She’s from 20 different regions. Everybody wants to claim her, proudly. It’s such an old story that no one could be proven right.” For Walt Disney Feature Animation, *Mulan* presented an unusual and powerful story and distinctive

characters. The tale of *Mulan* also contains universal themes – that often the individual must sacrifice for the greater good, and that the path of personal discovery lies in that sacrifice. It was a legend that was developed enough to contain those strong elements, but spare enough to invite further development by the Disney storytellers. And though the incidents of the Disney story may differ from the Asian legends, the spirit of the story has survived intact. *Mulan* premiered at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles on June 5, 1998, and was released on June 19, 1998.