

# Controversy over *Mulan* film used to further Washington's anti-China agenda

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23 September 2020

Disney released its latest live-action film remake, *Mulan*, to general audiences September 4 on Disney Plus, the company's online streaming platform. Prior to and after its release, the United States and its allies have targeted the movie as part of their anti-China agenda, which is being whipped up under the phony banner of defending human rights.

Within a few days of the film's release, a campaign was launched to block it, with the hashtag, #BoycottMulan trending on Twitter. Those involved denounced the movie, after noticing that the end credits included "special thanks" to various Chinese agencies, including the Publicity Department of CPC Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomy Region Committee and the Turpan Municipal Bureau of Public Security. Turpan is located in Xinjiang Province and the US applied sanctions to the bureau in question last year, ostensibly in response to the treatment of the ethnic Uyghur population living in Xinjiang.

While most of *Mulan* was shot in New Zealand, parts were also filmed in Xinjiang, in order "to accurately depict some of the unique landscape and geography for this historic period drama," said Disney's Chief Financial Officer Christine McCarthy, in response to the controversy.

Opponents of Beijing also criticized lead actress Liu Yifei, who plays the film's titular character, after she posted support on Twitter for the Hong Kong police in August 2019, during the mass protests that were taking place then. Liu shared other pro-police tweets while writing: "I also support the Hong Kong police."

Washington has seized on the denunciations of the filming location to further ramp up tensions with China. These denunciations are entirely hypocritical. The capitalist regime in Beijing undoubtedly utilizes repressive and police-state measures to silence any

opposition to its rule. But US accusations of human rights violations in Xinjiang are highly selective and meant to further Washington's imperialist interests, as well as provide a pretext for military aggression.

The same is equally true of Washington's claims to support democratic rights in regions like Hong Kong and Taiwan, where US governments have long supported colonial rule and dictatorships.

The US has focused on Xinjiang in particular, as it has significant natural resources, including oil, and neighbors energy-rich Central Asian republics with whom Beijing is working to develop close economic ties. Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative also passes through the Xinjiang region.

Republican Senator Marco Rubio, who has spearheaded anti-China legislation over Xinjiang, sent a bipartisan letter to Disney, demanding answers as to why the company chose to film in that location. He accused the agencies listed in the film credits of being the "most responsible for committing atrocities—or for covering up those crimes."

Yet, at the same time, Washington oversees and encourages police and vigilante violence against peaceful protesters in the US; the persecution of whistleblowers and journalists exposing US war crimes, most notably Julian Assange, and runs concentration camps for immigrants. This is in addition to the numerous imperialist crimes Washington has carried out during the 20th century, including supporting military coups throughout Asia.

Washington is also working to "decouple" the US economy from China's, in order to apply additional pressure on Beijing, driven by Washington's desire to eliminate a major economic competitor. Washington's criticisms of *Mulan* and Disney are meant to ramp up pressure on US companies to either cut ties with China

or join Washington's anti-China maneuvering. This is particularly difficult for US companies, which see a foothold in the China market as a major source of profit.

In July, Attorney General William Barr delivered a diatribe in Michigan against US companies and universities. He demanded that companies like Disney should be devoted to the coming war effort, essentially putting themselves at the disposal of the State Department and the Pentagon, promoting the propaganda of US imperialism at home and abroad.

He stated: "In World War II, for example, the iconic American company, Disney, made dozens of public information films for the government, including training videos to educate American sailors on navigation tactics. During the war, over 90 percent of Disney employees were devoted to the production of training and public information films. To boost the morale of America's troops, Disney also designed insignia that appeared on planes, trucks, flight jackets, and other military equipment used by American and Allied forces."

Barr issued a veiled threat against those who fail to toe Washington's line, saying: "If Disney and other American corporations continue to bow to Beijing, they risk undermining both their own future competitiveness and prosperity, as well as the classical liberal order that has allowed them to thrive."

This campaign was not initiated with the current film or with Disney. It is part of an ongoing effort to drive divisions between the US and China. This not only involves the film industry, but other technology platforms and companies, such as Huawei and apps, WeChat and TikTok, which the Trump administration has moved to ban in the US.

Washington claims that Beijing uses all these platforms to influence, manipulate, or collect data on US citizens or the citizens of US allies. These statements are couched in anti-communist language, in order to conflate capitalist Beijing with genuine Marxism and discredit criticisms of the US. However, far from defending free speech, Washington's goal is to assert its control over the film industry, as well as technology and communication platforms, to censor and suppress any material that it views as a threat.

Last October, Vice President Mike Pence criticized US companies like Nike and the National Basketball

Association for doing business in China, and supposedly siding with Beijing over Hong Kong. "By exploiting corporate greed, Beijing is attempting to influence American public opinion, coercing corporate America," Pence stated. "And far too many American multinational corporations have kowtowed to the lure of China's money and markets by muzzling not only criticism of the Chinese Communist Party, but even affirmative expressions of American values."

Pence's provocative language highlights the extent to which the Trump administration and the entire US political establishment is seeking to foment a poisonous anti-Chinese atmosphere to divert rising class tensions at home.

Washington is faced with growing social anger at home, as protests grow against state-sanctioned killings and repression at the hands of the police. Millions of workers are also suffering from the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has killed more than 200,000 in the US alone. Neither the Republican nor Democratic parties have any solutions to these crises, outside of further militarism and the drive to war.



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