

U.S. war drive against China fuels ‘Mulan’ boycott

written by Struggle - La Lucha
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Chinese American actor Liu Yifei, who plays the title role in the “Mulan” remake, became a target of anti-China forces in the U.S.

When the Walt Disney Company released its live-action remake of “Mulan,” the bourgeois media establishment responded with indignation and hand-wringing. This spread all the way to the U.S. Congress and the Trump administration.

Members of the Congressional-Executive Commission on China [authored a letter](#) to the CEO of Disney, signed by both Democrats and Republicans, demanding that Disney explain the nature of its relationship and collaboration with the Communist Party of China regional bodies in Xinjiang.

It demands that Disney disclose whether officials were aware of “mass surveillance and detention against Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities,” and whether Disney has a policy on “cooperating with entities that are known human rights abusers.” Marco Rubio, Tom Cotton, Jeff Merkley and Ted Cruz are among the representatives and senators who signed the letter. (For background on the U.S. slander campaign on Xinjiang, read [“The U.S. road to war on China.”](#))

Meanwhile, the U.S., at all levels of government, has supported the detention of immigrants and refugees in concentration camps, where they suffer sexual assault, forced sterilization and inhumane conditions that allow for a deadly spread of COVID-19.

The U.S. has also implemented mass surveillance and encouraged racist violence against Muslim immigrants and Muslim Americans. The U.S. also actively funds and supports countries like Israel, Saudi Arabia and the Philippines, whose government forces commit despicable human-rights atrocities and war crimes on a daily basis.

Talking heads within the bourgeois media establishment who called for the boycott of the “Mulan” remake are being hailed as [activists](#) or [protesters](#), creating massive confusion around the issue. They call for this boycott because this remake is supposedly “pro-China” at a time when China is “committing human-rights atrocities.” In reality, it’s because the U.S. is beating its war drums against China.

One such “activist” is Joshua Wong, considered the face of the “pro-democracy” movement in Hong Kong. What many don’t know is that Wong and an overwhelming swath of the protest movement in Hong Kong are [funded and supported](#) by the National Endowment for Democracy, a tax-funded “nonprofit” arm of the U.S. State Department founded and designed for regime change operations. Wong is [on public record](#) meeting with some of the same right-wing politicians that signed the letter to Disney.

Many of the other “activists” calling for a boycott of the movie are deeply swayed by the bourgeois media’s Cold War attitude towards China. Even liberal talking heads criticized Trump for freezing funds [meant to benefit Hong Kong protesters](#).

Struggle-La Lucha interviewed Eliza Romero and Chris Jesu Lee of the “Unverified Accounts” podcast, who released an episode about the hypocrisy and double standards to which the live action remake of “Mulan” is held.

Struggle-La Lucha: Tell us a little about you — your organization, previous projects, etc.

Eliza Romero: I’m a coordinator for Malaya Movement’s Baltimore chapter as well as a blogger and podcast host. My blog and podcast both go under the name “Aesthetic Distance.” I’m also one of the co-hosts of the “Unverified Accounts” podcast, which just launched last week.

Chris Jesu Lee: I’m one of the creators of “Plan A,” an Asian American political/cultural magazine and podcast. Eliza, Filip and I are the creators of “Unverified Accounts”!

Eliza: Filip Guo, our third host, is also one of the creators of “Plan A” and based out of Toronto.

SLL: Tell us a little about your podcast, your fellow hosts, and why you decided to

start it.

Eliza: “Unverified Accounts” is a place for Asian American opinions on arts and culture, with politics naturally coming into play. The idea is for my co-hosts and I to air our own perspectives, which are often at odds with those of the majority of neoliberal Asian American celebrities. Every Monday, Chris Jesu Lee, Filip Guo and I discuss movies, books and TV shows that are connected to cultural and political issues that are trending, generally on social media. We’re an alternative to your typical “NPR/NBC/HuffPost Asian American” fare.

SLL: Why did you decide to talk about “Mulan” (2020)? What is your take on it?

Eliza: We talked extensively about the new “Mulan” film in episode 3 of “Unverified Accounts,” [“Mulan Rouge: The New Red Scare.”](#) We are all big fans of the original animated Disney film from 1998 and were skeptical about the remake. After all, Disney live-action remakes haven’t been very successful, save for a very few. Also, Western movies haven’t always been kind to Asian people or culture. We were curious about how the liberal elite crowd, who are very concerned with positive representation of Asians in the media, would react to a story that is very clearly pro-China and is unsubtly attempting to market to Chinese audiences. We also anticipated pushback since the U.S. is now embroiled in a Cold War with China.

What we found was that regardless of how one feels about China, it’s pretty sickening to watch Asians try so desperately to prove their loyalty to America by creating a moral panic about the movie and/or letting themselves be used as political pawns. Our podcast detailed the hypocrisy in their reasoning — after all, there were no calls to boycott movies that proclaim loyalty to the U.S. or Britain or other imperialist nations, so why single this movie out? The U.S. is the biggest violator of human rights in the world.

If they praise Marvel movies, which are very pro-capitalist, pro-military-industrial

complex, pro-surveillance state, how can they boycott “Mulan” for being pro-China? The same people calling for the boycott praised other nationalist movies like “The Good Shepherd,” “Saving Private Ryan,” “1917” and “Dunkirk” too. Why are they okay with the U.S. and Britain doing it, but it’s “immoral” when China does it?

While many boycotters of the “Mulan” remake talk extensively about their love for the original, we found a lot of hypocrisy here too, because narratively, the original and the remake are exactly the same. The only difference is the timing of their releases and current political pressures. It was rather hilarious watching some people try to resolve this cognitive dissonance.

On the representation side of things, there were calls to boycott the movie because “there was zero representation of Asian people” in the production of the film. This was also hypocritical because they do not criticize the lack of representation behind the scenes in the original 1998 animated film, which was also written, produced and directed by white people and had fewer Asian voice actors than the new version had on-screen. Some consistency, please!

Chris: I thought the movie was pretty bad, as most of these Disney live-action remakes are. But a lot of the criticism has obvious political or personal agendas. The bigger picture story is how unnecessary this movie is because Asia doesn’t really need America’s approval as much as before. This movie predictably flopped in China. Why would China want to watch a Hollywood knock-off of its own material? It’s this loss of American centrality that has so many people enraged and anxious.

SLL: What would you hope to happen if more people listened to this episode? Or your podcast in general?

Eliza: Our podcast is an alternative to the typical neoliberal takes on arts and culture in mainstream media, especially among mainstream Asian American media outlets. With every episode we release, we hope to embolden people to think in other

ways or speak up about beliefs they've always held but are afraid to voice. With our "Mulan" episode, we hope to help our listeners see that there are some dark, anti-communist forces at work with the boycott of the film — it's a combination of red scare and yellow peril. And many mainstream Asian liberal elites are weaponizing their own identities to push forward a pro-U.S. imperialist, anti-Chinese agenda.

SLL: Where can people find your podcast or any of your other work?

Eliza: You can find "Unverified Accounts" and "The Aesthetic Distance Podcast" on Apple, Google Play, Spotify and wherever you listen to podcasts. New episodes of "Unverified Accounts" are released every Monday morning. You can find my blog at aestheticdistance.com and I am also very active on social media (Instagram @aestheticdistance/Twitter @aesthdistance1).

Additionally, Malaya Movement Baltimore is an organization that I am very proud to be a part of. It is the Baltimore chapter of the Malaya Movement, a U.S.-based movement against the killing and dictatorship and for democracy in the Philippines. As our name indicates, Malaya (Filipino for "free") seeks not only to broaden our opposition against fascism but also to broaden support for the cause of freedom, democracy and human rights in the Philippines.

Follow us on Instagram (@malaya.baltimore) to stay updated on all of our upcoming national and Baltimore-based campaigns, actions and educational sessions. You can also [join our movement](#) by filling out this form. If you're not in Baltimore, that's okay. We will connect you with the chapter closest to you.

