

Loyal, brave, true: Why you should boycott 'Mulan'

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Byline: Michelle Fan

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By Michelle Fan

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The Daily Targum

The live-action remake of the Disney classic "Mulan" faced backlash after fans realized the film's connection to Uyghur "re-education" camps and the lead actress's support for the Hong Kong police force.

When the live-action remake of the Disney classic movie "Mulan" was announced years ago, the hearts of thousands of Asian-American girls soared and sang with glee.

Mulan is one of the few Disney princesses of color, and arguably the Disney princess with the most compelling story - not about falling in love or finding her prince, but about discovering her own strength, living her truth and saving her country. From "Reflection" to "I'll Make A Man Out Of You," the movie was also filled with some of the most iconic music that defined this era of Disney animated films.

The excitement and joy I felt at the prospect of seeing the lore of Mulan reimagined on the big screen, with a full cast of people who look like me, telling the story of a woman simultaneously fighting for her people and against her patriarchal society, kept me on the edge of my seat for months. I eagerly awaited any and all news, trailers and teasers about the movie.

So I also quickly learned that this "Mulan" was not the same "Mulan" that I had grown up with. Besides the many developments to the filming that alarmed excited fans - such as the changes to the story, the characters and the music, all of which I was able to accept after some hesitance - news emerged that Liu Yifei, the beautiful actress cast as Mulan, declared her support for the Hong Kong Police Force in midst of the Hong Kong democracy protests of 2019.

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She shared a post that expressed support for the police force, which had arrested more than 1,300 protesters by September 2019 and had been repeatedly criticized by international human rights organizations for "excessive use of force," including brutal beatings, torture and sexual violence in police detention.

"I also support the Hong Kong police," Liu wrote on Weibo, a popular Chinese social media platform. I wasn't particularly surprised by her post - many Chinese celebrities, from Jackson Wang, a Hong Kong native himself, to Lay, who was previously a member of the K-pop boy band EXO, have either denounced the protests or expressed their support for the Hong Kong police force. But I was still frustrated to see that the actress playing Mulan, my childhood hero, could condone the violence and brutality that threatened the lives of many of my own close friends.

As more footage from the movie emerged, something else about the movie alarmed me. "This was definitely shot in Western China," my mother mused as we watched the trailers together. "Probably Xinjiang."

Indeed, the official release of "Mulan" thanked several Chinese government bodies, including the Xinjiang government's publicity department and the Public Security and Tourism bureaus for Turpan, a city in Xinjiang with several "re-education camps."

The Public Security Bureau of Turpan specifically has been listed by the U.S. government as an organization involved in human rights violations and abuses. China has repeatedly come under fire from multiple organizations, including the United Nations, for the arbitrary detention and "re-education" of more than 1 million Uyghurs in camps in Xinjiang. That parts of "Mulan" may have been filmed right next to what more and more scholars and experts are calling a genocide truly makes me sick to my stomach.

Mulan is a story about a girl who struggles to fit the mold of what a gentle, demure Chinese wife should be. Instead, she steals her father's armor and weapons in the middle of the night and rides off to defend her family's honor and her country's future. It's an exhilarating, gender-bending legend about defying traditional expectations for feminine propriety, becoming your most authentic self and most importantly, fighting for what is right.

This live-action remake featured a cast of iconic Chinese-American actors, phenomenal costume design and incredible traditional Chinese sets and architecture. Needless to say, my heart shattered at the realization that I would not be able to support this film.

I still want to see diverse representation in Hollywood, especially of Asian characters and narratives. I still want more movies of women taking charge and saving the day, as they often do in real life. I still want to support the creators, actors and artists who make all of these films possible. But I cannot do so at the expense of other morals.

Mulan, in the remake, reminds us to be "loyal, brave and true" - and I know the real Mulan, the hero who lives on in my heart and my conscience, would want us to stand up for the values we believe in.

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