



ARTS & CULTURE

Disney Criticized for Filming New 'Mulan' in China's Xinjiang

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The Walt Disney Company is receiving criticism for filming part of its new live-action movie *Mulan* in the Xinjiang area of China. The Chinese government has been accused of human rights abuses against Uyghurs and other mostly Muslim minorities in the area.

At the end of the film is a message thanking official communications departments in Xinjiang. It also thanked the public security office of Turpan, a Uyghur-majority city in the **region**.

Mulan was released last week on the streaming site Disney Plus.

Human rights activists and China experts have expressed condemnation on social media sites. They say Disney behaved unethically to gain entrance to China's profitable movie market, the second largest in the world.

Amnesty International tweeted a link to a media report on the issue and asked Disney, "Can you show us your human rights **due diligence** report?" A Washington Post opinion writer called the movie a **scandal**. A widely shared tweet suggested the *Mulan* film crew would have seen re-education camps for Uyghurs on their way to filming **locations**.

Prison camps or training centers?

Uyghurs and other minorities in China have been detained in camps as part of a government **assimilation** campaign. The Chinese government says it acted in answer to years of sometimes violent struggle against Chinese rule in the region.

Chinese officials defend the camps as job training centers. But former detainees describe them as prison-like. They report beatings, denial of food and other abuses. Some female detainees say they were forced to have medical treatments to end pregnancies or disable their reproductive ability. In recent months, detainees have been reportedly ordered to drink traditional Chinese medicine to right the coronavirus spread.

“There is no so-called reeducation camp in Xinjiang,” foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said Tuesday when asked about the *Mulan* issue. He said the “training centers” were a good exploration of antiterrorism and **deradicalization** methods. “There have been no violent attacks in Xinjiang for more than three years,” Zhao added.

No comment from Disney

The *Mulan* team filmed in several other parts of China including the cities of Xi’an and Dunhuang, director Niki Caro’s social media messages showed. The movie was also partly filmed in New Zealand.

Disney did not answer The Associated Press's request for comment.

The new film is a remake of the popular 1998 **animated** *Mulan*. It is based on the ancient Chinese story of Hua Mulan, a young woman who tricks people into thinking she is a man so she can join the army.

The remake has been the center of other criticism.

'Mulan' criticism not new

Last year, a boycott movement began after the lead actor, Liu Yifei, publicly supported Hong Kong police accused of abuse against pro-democracy demonstrators. Hong Kong activists also criticized another actor in the film, Donnie Yen, for his pro-China position.

Alan Horn is co-chairman and chief creative officer of Walt Disney Studios. He said in February that the company did not want to enter into a political discussion.

“I can’t speak for what Yifei says in China, we didn’t know about it, what she was going to say, and that’s up to them,” he said during a discussion with industry leaders from Netflix, Warner Brothers and other companies.

Horn did note the importance of the Chinese market, where *Mulan* opens Friday. “If *Mulan* doesn’t work in China, we have a problem,” he said with a laugh.

Disney's high hopes for a profitable 'Mulan'

In August, Disney reported sharp financial losses from shutting down many operations and canceling theatrical releases because of the coronavirus.

Disney has high hopes for the *Mulan* remake, one of its most costly productions ever. It is pushing limited theatrical releases in some countries and has put the movie on its online service for a price of \$29.99.

Ferkat Jawdat is a Uyghur-American activist. He said he is usually a “huge fan” of Disney movies and that “*Mulan* should be a must watch for my family.” But he said he would not be watching this Disney remake, describing it as **hypocritical**.

Activists have renewed calls for a boycott of the film in Hong Kong, where it will be released next week.

I'm Ashley Thompson.

The Associated Press reported this story. Caty Weaver adapted it for VOA Learning English. Ashley Thompson was the editor.

Words in This Story

region – *n.* a part of a country, of the world, etc., that is different or separate from other parts in some way

due diligence – *n.* in law: the care that a reasonable person exercises to avoid harm to other persons or their property

scandal – *n.* an occurrence in which people are shocked and upset because of behavior that is morally or legally wrong

location – *n.* a place or position

assimilation – *n.* the full acceptance and adoption of the ways of another culture

deradicalization – *n.* a process or action to change extreme political or social views that are not shared by most people

animation – *n.* a movie made of a series of drawings, computer graphics, or photographs of objects

hypocritical – *adj.* describes a person or people who claim or pretend to have certain beliefs about what is right but behave in a way that disagrees with those beliefs
