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HOLLYWOOD

# CHINA OWNS HOLLYWOOD

*How China Has Cowed Hollywood and  
Loud-Mouthed Celebrities*

# Background

Hollywood loves nothing more than criticizing America's past and present. When the "Best Picture" nominees are released each year by the Academy, it's difficult to spot a single film where a spokesperson is not making a political statement about the United States. Even the Oscars presenters may make political and social diatribes, such as Joaquin Phoenix's 2020 rant against dairy foods. Yet when it comes to China, a fascist regime that routinely abuses human rights and censors artists, Hollywood has little to say.

This report examines how high-profile movie moguls and celebrities are intimidated by Chinese censors or are complicit in covering up the Chinese Communist Party-funded abuse of people and the environment. The same Americans can often be found disparaging America.

Filmmakers may claim to be artists but, at the end of the day, they want to make money. And China has a massive marketplace with more than 1.4 billion people.

The problem for American filmmakers is that China generally only allows **34 foreign films** to air each year. If American filmmakers want to land one of those slots, they must play by the rules of the Chinese Communist Party.

Hollywood's desperation to land on the big screen in China has become an effective tool in which some of the biggest American celebrities have become useful idiots — or worse — to assist China's soft power campaign in the United States.

## Self-Censorship and CCP Editing

The Chinese Communist Party has **total control** over what films can appear in theaters (and until recently they also had effective control of what could be shown on over 8,000 screens in America). The CCP can decide when a film is aired. If a film upsets the Chinese government, it will never air in China. If a film pleases the CCP, it can be rewarded with ideal premiere dates such as holiday weekends.

This dynamic not only encourages Hollywood to not offend Chinese officials, but to go out of their way to kowtow to them. This takes place in two forms: self-censorship and editing.

Self-censorship is rampant throughout Hollywood. A few examples:

- In the 2012 remake of **Red Dawn**, the production company MGM spent \$1 million editing out all Chinese military insignia in the film and replacing it with North Korean details to avoid angering the Chinese Communist Party before the film was released.
- The 2010 remake of **The Karate Kid** swapped Karate, a Japanese sport, with Kung Fu, a Chinese sport, to gain favor with the CCP before the film was released.
- The 2012 film **Total Recall** renamed a key location in the film from "New Asia" to "The Colony" to avoid any controversy in China.

- Careful viewers of the 2021 remake of **Top Gun** noticed that Taiwanese and Japanese flags on the back of Tom Cruise's jacket in the original film were replaced with two fake, meaningless symbols to avoid offending the Chinese.
- The filmmakers behind **Doctor Strange** opted not to cast an Asian actress to play the Ancient One because they did not want to allude to the fact that the character in the comics was from Tibet, something that could offend Chinese officials. (Tibet was an independent state that was invaded by Communist China in 1950.)
- The 2015 film **Pixels** removed a scene depicting the destruction of the Great Wall of China while including depictions of the destruction of Manhattan and the Washington Monument.

When films are edited ahead of time, the CCP can make demands to change the film after the fact. There are many examples of American films receiving last-minute edits after facing demands from the CCP. Other films are released with added scenes to help encourage Chinese placement:

- The filmmakers behind **Iron Man 3** released a special version of the film in China featuring four extreme minutes of content that include brand placements for TLC, a tech company, and Yili, a Chinese drink.
- In **Mission Impossible 3**, the CCP demanded that filmmakers edit out a clip that featured laundry hanging in the windows of Shanghai apartments because it painted the city in an unflattering light. The edits were made before the film was released in China.
- In the 2012 film **Skyfall**, the CCP demanded that filmmakers cut two scenes because they depicted prostitution in Macau and the death of a Shanghai security guard. The film's Chinese release was delayed for two months while the edits were made.

Filmmakers also appease China by inserting cameos of Chinese citizens lending a hand. For instance, the movies *The Martian* and *Gravity* both featured the Chinese helping to save the day. After the release of *The Martian*, a Chinese government official used the scene to remark that the film "shows that our U.S. counterparts very much hope to cooperate with us."

**A 2020 report** from PEN America noted: "Perhaps the greatest issue with the CCP's censorious effect on Hollywood is how it has instantiated self-censorship from filmmakers aiming to anticipate and preempt Beijing's objections. This is, of course, exactly how censorship succeeds—others internalize it to the point where the censor actually has to do very little. Over time, writers and creators don't even conceive of ideas, stories, or characters that would flout the rules, because there is no point in doing so."

Hollywood executive Chris Fenton, whose book *Feeding the Dragon* describes Hollywood's submissive relationship with the Chinese Communist Party, says the fear of getting on the bad side of China is such that "It is almost impossible to find anyone to comment on the record in Hollywood. I definitely would say I'm sacrificing my business by being a squeaky wheel."

China punishes those who stand up to it. Richard Gere is reportedly **on a blacklist** after angering the Chinese communist government with his personal support for Tibet. And the release of *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* **was blocked in China** after Quentin Tarantino refused to cut a scene to appease Chinese censors.

# Teaming Up With China

Chinese officials purposefully make their standards unclear so that Hollywood will do everything possible to eliminate anything that could possibly be interpreted as offensive to the CCP. To avoid the risk of having a film rejected, some of Hollywood's largest studios have just begun working directly with the Chinese government when making their films. From casting to filming to editing, the CCP gets a say.

The most well-known example of this dynamic took place between Disney and the Chinese government's China Film Co. Production Corporation in the production of the 2020 live-action film *Mulan*. In the **end credits** of the film, Disney noted that the film was "supervised" by the China Film Co. and it thanked several Chinese government agencies, including the **Turpan Bureau of Public Security**. Just prior to the film's release, the U.S. Commerce Department sanctioned the Turpan Bureau for "human rights violations and abuses in the implementation of China's campaign of repression, mass arbitrary detention and high-technology surveillance against Uighurs, Kazakhs, and other members of Muslim minority groups."

Parts of the film were even **shot in Xinjiang province**, the region of China where Uighurs are being detained in tortuous "reeducation" camps. The U.S. government has declared China's actions in the region genocidal.

The filmmakers behind ***Transformers: Age of Extinction*** similarly worked hand-in-hand with CCP-tied organizations during production. The film credited Jaiflix Enterprises and CCTV's China Movie Channel, the official state broadcaster for the CCP.

# Celebrity Silence

The CCP's well-documented blacklist has ripple effects throughout the film industry. Actors know that offending China could mean they don't land a role in a top-grossing film or that their next film gets banned in China, reducing its box office gross. Outspoken celebrities fall silent when it comes to atrocities committed by the Chinese government.

We looked into celebrities of high-grossing films in China. Then we searched their social media feeds and news for political statements relating to the United States or China. We omitted apolitical celebrities.

For those celebrities who are relatively outspoken on American political issues, we found a lack of commentary about China—or worse, attempts to downplay bad things about China. Below are some examples that give more evidence of how self-censorship rules Hollywood when it comes to China.

# Mark Ruffalo


Perhaps the clearest example of China's money is with Mark Ruffalo. Prior to the release of *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, in which he played The Hulk, Ruffalo tweeted his support for democracy in Hong Kong and some criticisms of China. But since the film aired in China, Ruffalo has been silent. He has, however, managed to make routine criticisms of American politicians. His recent tweets appear to paint China as better than the U.S.

- “Think China is bad...? More than half of the U.S. is living with unhealthy pollution levels,” **Ruffalo tweeted**. (In fact, China is **one of the most polluted countries** on the planet.)

## Pre-Avengers Release



## Post-Avengers Release

 **Mark Ruffalo** ✓ @MarkRuffalo · Apr 19, 2015

Thanks Fans of **China**. #AvengerAgeOfUltron [instagram.com/p/1qB7KyrDUB/](https://www.instagram.com/p/1qB7KyrDUB/)

24 174 555

 **Mark Ruffalo** ✓ @MarkRuffalo · Apr 20, 2016

Think **China** is bad...? More than half of the U.S. is living with unhealthy pollution levels [huffingtonpost.com/entry/state-of...](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/state-of-...) # via @HuffPostGreen



More Than Half Of The U.S. Is Living With Unhealthy ...  
And climate change isn't helping.  
[huffpost.com](https://www.huffpost.com)

23 259 473

 **Mark Ruffalo** ✓ @MarkRuffalo · Apr 12, 2017

Where **China** eats our lunch and drinks our Sunlight Milkshake. Got to hand it to them though. #maga

 **Greenpeace East Asia** ✓ @GreenpeaceEAsia · Apr 11, 2017

China's #renewables revolution is unstoppable! Check out these amazing facts [act.gp/2potzfA](https://act.gp/2potzfA)



CHINA'S  
**RENEWABLES**  
INDUSTRY  
WILL EMPLOY  
**7.7 MILLION**  
PEOPLE  
BY 2030

15 65 231

# Steven Spielberg

The famed director created the film [The Post](#) in response to President Trump's alleged attacks on the free press, but he remains silent about the fact that the free press is not even allowed in China. Spielberg [has said](#) global warming is not a political trick, but we can find no statements from him critiquing China's poor environmental record. Spielberg over a decade ago was a China critic, dropping out of being an artistic adviser to the 2008 Beijing Olympics because he thought China wasn't doing enough to help Darfur. But more recently, Spielberg appears to have been silent as his business interests in China grew. Spielberg's film *Ready Player One* made millions in China. Spielberg also cut a business deal with the Chinese firm [Alibaba](#) in 2016, adding another financial reason why Spielberg may not have any criticisms for the CCP.

## Hanks, Spielberg: Trump Administration Like Nixon's

The famous actor and director see similarities between Trump and disgraced ex-president Richard Nixon.

By [Megan Trimble](#) | Dec. 15, 2017, at 10:36 a.m.

## Steven Spielberg: 'The urgency to make *The Post* was because of Trump's administration'

▲ Steven Spielberg at the premiere of *The Post*. Photograph: James Shaw/Rex/Shutterstock

The director dropped everything - including new blockbuster *Ready Player One* - to tell the story of the Washington Post's decision to publish the Pentagon Papers. He talks about parallels between Nixon and Trump and why Oprah Winfrey would be a 'brilliant' president

by [Jonathan Freedland](#)

# James Cameron

Cameron called the Trump administration **“insane”** but he hasn’t had anything to say about the Chinese Communist Party — which waged war on images of Winnie the Pooh. Cameron’s film *Avatar* was just released in China and the handful of planned sequels are slated to run in China, as well. While Cameron is an **outspoken environmentalist** in the U.S., he’s had nothing to say about Chinese pollution.

ENTERTAINMENT

## James Cameron on the Trump Administration: ‘These People Are Insane’

THE DEEP

The Oscar-winning filmmaker opens up about his new NatGeo doc ‘Atlantis Rising,’ premiering Jan. 29th, the Oscars’ blockbuster bias, and why our civilization is doomed. PLUS check out an exclusive clip of Cameron on the set of ‘Avatar 2.’

Marlow Stern  
Senior Entertainment Editor | Updated Apr. 11, 2017 4:10PM ET / Published Jan. 29, 2017 7:57AM ET

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The Washington Post  
Democracy Dies in Darkness

Climate and Environment

## James Cameron wants you to fight global warming by changing what you eat

fromjimcameron china

Top Latest People Photos Videos

James Cameron @JimCameron · Mar 10

Oel ngati kameie, China! We're excited to bring *Avatar* back to your big screens this weekend.



193 391 2.8K

James Cameron @JimCameron · Jul 23, 2020

Starting today, @OceanX's visually compelling and important stories of ocean exploration and discovery come to China thanks to a new partnership with @Paradisefdn.



深海寻鲨 (Sharks In The Deep)

Earlier in the week we announced our new partnership with The Paradise Foundation ...

youtube.com

29 50 308

James Cameron @JimCameron · Jul 21, 2020

Congratulations to @RayDalio's @OceanX and the @paradisefdn.

Through their partnership, extraordinary stories of ocean exploration and discovery will reach the world's largest audience — China.

James Cameron: 'We're the biggest freakin' idiot civilization in history!'

## James Cameron Rips Trump’s America, Fox News: ‘I Kinda Don’t Give a S— Anymore’

TCA 2018: “Avatar” director sees an awful lot of “1984” and “Fahrenheit 451” in this “fake news” era

Tony Maglio | January 13, 2018 @ 5:28 PM

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# Brie Larson

Larson had no problem accusing the U.S. of top-to-bottom **sexism** when *Captain Marvel* underperformed in theaters. She is happy to endorse defunding the police. And she spoke out when Trump revoked the Obama administration’s rule on transgender bathroom use in schools, calling it a matter of “protection and equality.”

But Larson has said nothing about the human rights atrocities occurring in China, such as “protection and equality” for abused Uighurs or Hong Kong pro-democracy activists who have been persecuted. *Captain Marvel* did much better internationally with **China carrying** the bulk of the ticket sales.

News

### Brie Larson Won't Let 'Captain Marvel' Press Tour Be 'Overwhelming White Male'

by Theo Glassman  
February 12, 2019 | Updated November 24, 2020



Report: Thor Actor Natalie Portman and Captain Marvel's Brie Larson Sign Open Letter To Defund Police Departments

**Brie Larson** @brielarson

This is disgusting. This is unacceptable. I #StandWithGavin and every Trans person who deserve nothing less than protection and equality.

**The Hill** @thehill  
Trump to roll back protections for transgender students: report  
hill.cm/aGUVlpP

### Brie Larson is sick of being interviewed by 'white dudes'

The 'Captain Marvel' star is campaigning for more diversity in the press pool. Will it work?

Wed, Feb 13, 2019, 15:20

**Donald Clarke** Film Correspondent

← from:brielarson china

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# Jason Momoa

As part of his **environmental advocacy**, Momoa called humanity a “disease” and openly protested and criticized Americans for not doing enough to protect the planet. When it comes to China, one of the world’s largest polluters, however, Momoa hasn’t had anything to say. Momoa’s film *Aquaman* thrived in China.

SCIENCE & TECH

## Jason Momoa Calls Humanity a ‘Disease’ in UN Climate Speech

by Matthew Hart  
Sep 30 2019 • 12:17 PM

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 **prideofgypsies** Just landed. Back in China so stoked for our amazing opening weekend here mahalo China. Still tripping out on last night @nbcsnl met so many beautiful talented people. Can't wait to come back some day. The tour is on again Hong Kong to Manila aloha j

126w

  
*By Jessica Bailey*

### IF JASON MOMOA HAD A TRIDENT IN REAL LIFE, HE'D USE IT TO FIX AMERICA

*But he might need a couple of them*



 **prideofgypsies** • Follow

 **prideofgypsies** Me and my friends. Cheers to China. @caldercrisis @realdealmada world tour #savagesinsuits mahalo Jeanne Yang Corey Lenh aloha j

185w

 **eric\_corella** Jason momoa en el technopolis @sarad13

178w Reply

View replies (1)

 **gianmariaspine** Where and when we shut this picture together??

108,303 likes

# Scarlett Johansson

Johansson was **one of dozens** of celebrities to appear in an anti-Trump campaign advertisement in 2016. She has also made statements about the political affairs of **Egypt** and **Hungary**. Yet the *Black Widow* star hasn't said anything about the atrocities in China or political prisoners in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, several of her recent films have been selected to air in China and she has been the subject of **glowing reviews** by Chinese propaganda outlets.



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### Chinese netizens congratulate Scarlett Johansson on her two Oscar nominations

Source: Global Times Published: 2020/1/14 20:56:36

A close-up video still of Scarlett Johansson speaking. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. Her hair is pulled back. A search icon is visible in the top right corner of the video frame.

The New Arab Staff  
**Hollywood actress Scarlett Johansson urges Egypt to release rights group's members**

Scarlett Johansson has urged Egypt to free staff members of leading human rights group [YouTube] Date of publication: 2 December, 2020

HOME > ENTERTAINMENT

### Scarlett Johansson speaks out on the 'scary' Trump administration: 'darkness is nigh'

Carrie Wittmer Mar 31, 2017, 2:07 PM