



11350 Random Hills Road, Suite 800, Fairfax, Virginia 22030 Phone (703) 934-6101 Fax (703) 352-3678

[fff@fff.org](mailto:fff@fff.org) [www.fff.org](http://www.fff.org)

## Jackie Chan's Misguided Concept of Freedom by Scott McPherson

“He that would make his own liberty secure must guard even his enemy from oppression; for if he violates this duty, he establishes a precedent that will reach to himself.” — Thomas Paine

Of all the great things ever said in regard to human freedom, the above quotation makes perhaps the most profound point about the mental state needed to create and preserve a free political state. One can speak of the value of education, virtue, religion, or personal responsibility in the maintenance of a free society. But what is needed most of all is *tolerance*.

Contrary to how it is typically introduced, however, the concept of tolerance doesn't mean acceptance of or indifference to any actions or thoughts of others. It means first an identification and self-assuredness about what is right and wrong — and an equal dedication to letting others find that out for themselves.

It means that one is respectful enough of others' free will that he will stand by and watch someone make the wrong choice — so long as this choice does not violate the equal right of others to make their choices — without *forceful* interference, on the principle that *only* through the freedom of thought and action can real truth be found.

If politics follows culture, then only when most people hold this kind of tolerance as the centerpiece in their value system will laws and government reflect a spirit of freedom.

Now, compare that with a statement made recently — apparently to much applause — by Hollywood actor Jackie Chan. While taking part in a panel discussion for Chinese businessmen in the province of Hainan, Chan “was asked to discuss censorship and restrictions on filmmakers in China,” according to the Associated Press (April 19). “Chan said Saturday he's not sure if a free society is a good thing for China and that he's starting to think ‘we Chinese need to be controlled.’”

“I'm not sure if it's good to have freedom or not,” he said. “I'm really confused now. If you're too free, you're like the way Hong Kong is now. It's very chaotic. Taiwan is also chaotic.

I'm gradually beginning to feel that we Chinese need to be controlled. If we're not being controlled, we'll just do what we want."

Like run off to Hollywood and make millions acting in bad movies?

The fundamental flaw in the thinking of those who want people to be organized like bees in a hive is their incredibly naive belief that *they* will be the Queen Bee. One can only speculate on the incredibly low sense of self-worth that must attach to those who would counter that they really want to be worker bees — but there's no reason not to take Chan at his word. He believes that the level of freedom enjoyed by people in Hong Kong or Taiwan is "too much freedom" and that "we Chinese need to be controlled." By whom? Maybe those cheering Chan's words were foolish enough to believe it would be them.

Taiwan and Hong Kong stand as great symbols of limited government, private enterprise, cheap consumer goods, and individual prosperity. What part of that exactly does Jackie Chan oppose? Freedom means the ability to pursue one's dreams; to become wealthy, virtuous, and educated; and to exercise personal responsibility, to find those things that make life worth living — even if others disagree on the choice made — and then accept the reward or suffer the consequences. Taking that freedom away from people doesn't improve anyone or anything. At best it makes everyone equally poor and miserable, and in a poor society fewer people go to the cinema. At its worst it creates dictatorship and death camps for those most in "need" of being "controlled."

Jackie Chan is free to make such atrocious statements — what's left of our free society can and should tolerate such imbecility. "He that would make his own liberty secure must guard even his enemy from oppression." We can respect Chan's freedom to say what he likes — but his thinking is wrongheaded and dangerous, and ought to be resisted at every turn.

*Scott McPherson is a policy advisor at The Future of Freedom Foundation.*

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