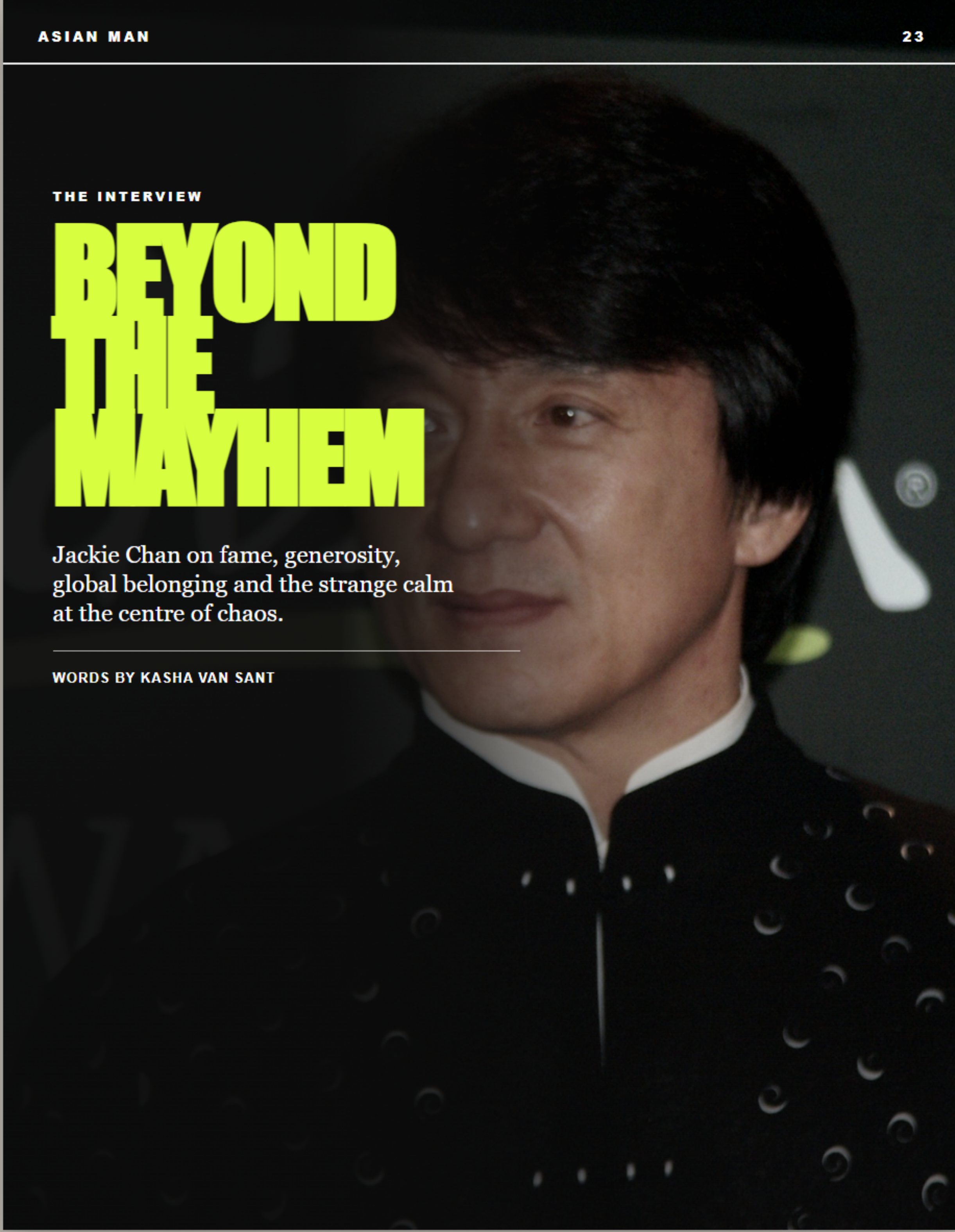


THE INTERVIEW

BEYOND THE MAYHEM

Jackie Chan on fame, generosity,
global belonging and the strange calm
at the centre of chaos.

WORDS BY KASHA VAN SANT



01 / ARRIVAL

The room is already moving before Jackie Chan even begins to speak.

When we think of Jackie Chan, we imagine him defying the laws of physics whilst deflecting myriad objects, inanimate or otherwise. But is there more to him than meets the eye?

We all know and love films like *Rush Hour*, *Who Am I?* and *The Tuxedo*, but there is one secret mission China's beloved export has kept to himself. Away from death-defying celluloid antics, Jackie Chan is a pioneer and

visionary who has been the champion of more than just the art of Kung Fu.

His excellence as a film star and Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Children's Fund and AIDS agencies culminated in the receipt of a World Diversity Award at the May Fair Hotel, London. And it was in this very room, as I stood waiting to interview him, that I watched the mayhem ensue around me.

“WHEREVER I WENT I TRIED TO HELP MORE AND MORE PEOPLE.”

He explained, “Twenty years ago I started checking up on the Asians in Hong Kong, beginning only by helping local people and children. Slowly as I got more ability I went beyond Hong Kong to Thailand, Malaysia and slowly after that, I travelled around the world. Wherever I went I tried to help more and more people.”

Jackie has often been depicted on screen as a superior martial artist with comedy making up a large element of his films. But what I did not expect was to see this manifest before my very eyes.

Natural charisma and sheer surprise at his existence had created a frenzy. And on the precarious stage we conducted our interview amidst calamity and chaos, straight off one of his film sets. Naturally he didn't break into a sweat, unlike everyone else, including his uncomfortable PR rep.



QUESTIONS, CAMERAS AND A ROOM IN CONSTANT MOTION.

02 / PURPOSE

THE FAME IS NOT THE POINT

We carried on stoically. Like contemporaries such as Donnie Yen, Sammo Hung and Jet Li, who dominated Hong Kong cinema, breaking into Hollywood has not been easy. But now that those doors have been broken down, Jackie Chan is using his platform to exert much-needed influence.

He started off life in great poverty and it is a genuine respect for humanity that shines through in his roles, colouring them with a combination of humility, compassion and skill. For

him, making films has been based upon a little bit more than the usual motivations. It is a means to a different end.

“I realised that whenever I help people it makes me, not them, feel happy. I feel honoured when I sleep. If I do something for my country or if I do something for my family, it means so much. That is why this award was really unexpected. Everybody knows that I can kick, I can punch, I can jump but you know what — the worst thing is giving a speech.”



CALM AT THE CENTRE OF THE ROOM.

“Everybody knows that I can kick, I can punch, I can jump...”

**“...THE WORST THING
IS GIVING A SPEECH.”**

03 / RECOGNITION

HOW DID
THEY KNOW
ME?

It is no secret that Jackie Chan is revered around the world. His recent project with Bollywood starlet Mallika Sherawat, whom he described as “not only pretty, but also a super woman,” in their collaboration on *The Myth*, resulted in a trademark hero’s welcome in India.

“I was so surprised to see where all of those people came from. Fans were not even yowling for *Rush Hour*, they were yowling for films I made over twenty years ago like *Drunken Master II*. I was just so surprised. How did they know me?”



WORLD DIVERSITY AWARDS, MAY FAIR HOTEL, LONDON.

For those who are perplexed by Jackie’s self-perception, the sentiments are genuine. Unsurprisingly he still did not blink an eye at the head of steam that was building around him, even when part of the stage backdrop curtain took a tumble along with an overzealous fan.

Upon remarking that everybody knows who he is, he looked at me in shock and replied, “I don’t know why?”

But even in Mumbai in the middle of nowhere, children that were three years old to eighty-year-old ladies were shouting ‘Jackie Chan, Jackie Chan.’ It was really touching.”

Jackie is clearly humbled by such displays of adulation. Nevertheless the sense of self-discovery he makes with each human interaction is as much for his own benefit as it is for others.

“When I was in Mumbai, I thought that people were very poor, but one week later I found out that they were not poor and are very happy with their lives. They’re happy with what they are. They have land, they have cows and they have sheep. They never think about what cell phone they’re going to buy next week or what car they’re going to buy. I really appreciate that. That’s how human beings should be.”

04 / EVERYWHERE

I BELONG EVERYWHERE

One thing is for certain: Jackie Chan is a sensation in every sense of the word and is strangely oblivious to the impact that he has upon people. In the duration of the interview, his award was dropped and broken by fellow film compatriot, veteran actor and now film director, Willie Chan.

Even more members of the public stormed the stage for photographs and autographs, and the PR machine totally broke down, literally taking lighting rigs with them as they blustered about unable to corral their star. All in a day's work.

After some calm had been injected into the proceedings, my question to him was an obvious one. What were his thoughts on this insanity and the heightened excitement at his presence?

Still on hyperdrive, he answered, "I don't know why. All these years I made the movies that I like to make. I just like all the citizens around the world, and everybody treats me like them. Indian people treat me like I am Indian, so I belong to India. People in Japan treat me like I am Japanese, so I belong to Japan. I belong everywhere."

A truly universal force, then?

"Yeah and I'm really, really glad!"

So was his philosophy similar to Jet Li, whose sole purpose as an actor was to educate the populace about Buddhism and reaching out to the world? Although Jackie's extra-curricular pursuits point to a bigger picture, what did he have to say on the matter?

"Yeah, I think that too. I think every actor reaches a certain limit where they will change their mind about what they want. When I was young I wanted to make money, after making money I wanted to be famous, after I got everything, I realised that I need to help people and not just think about myself."

At the end of the day, Jackie Chan has achieved a level of status that would be the envy of many. He has caught some of the most eligible female Hollywood co-stars in his arms, embraced the young and the old, and used his influence to make changes where many politicians have failed.

The most important question of all has to be: is there any chance of *Rush Hour IV*? Laughing and grabbing my shoulders he replies, "I have only just finished *Rush Hour III*! I don't know, there might be *Rush Hour IV*."

After being swept rather inelegantly away by his now sheepish PR, our date was set for a follow up and more chaos would ensue...