



The recent arrests of actors Jaycee Chan Jo-ming (房祖名) and Kai Ko (柯震東) by Beijing police have again thrown celebrity drug use into the spotlight, as well as reigniting the debate over whether marijuana should be legalised in Chinese society



Chan Jo-ming, son of Jackie Chan.

Kai Ko apologising at a press conference.



BEIJING police stated that both local actor-singer Jaycee Chan Jo-ming, 31, and Taiwanese movie star Kai Ko, 23, were **detained** after they tested positive for marijuana use. Chan was put under “criminal detention” for “providing a shelter for others to abuse drugs”, an offence that carries a maximum penalty of three years’ imprisonment. Drug convictions can ruin anyone’s future and the consequences could be even more drastic for artists, as it could end their professional career. Chan’s case is also affecting his famous martial-arts actor father, Jackie Chan (成龍), who is an anti-drug icon, having been named Narcotics Control Ambassador by the Chinese police in 2009.

Angry, shocked and heartbroken

IN a statement, Chan senior said he was “very angry and shocked. As a public figure, I am ashamed. As a father, I am very sad and his mother is heartbroken. I told Jaycee, ‘If you have done something wrong, you must bear the consequences. As your father, I am willing to face the road ahead with you.’” Showbusiness is **notorious** for its celebrities abusing drugs, and many top performers have been the targets of high-profile drug busts. John Lennon was arrested for marijuana possession in 1968, as was his Beatles bandmate Paul McCartney, who was jailed for nine days in Japan when a few ounces of cannabis were found in his luggage in 1980. Some say law enforcement agencies are too harsh on celebrities and are always trying to make an example out of them. But movie stars and popular singers are **idolised** by many. They have great influence, especially over young people. It is understandable that they are being held to a higher standard.

Legalise marijuana?

MARIJUANA, also referred to as cannabis, is classified as a dangerous drug in Hong Kong and trafficking, possession or use carry very severe penalties. Yet, there is a worldwide campaign for legalising it and a number of countries and US states have already done so, to varying degrees. If marijuana is a dangerous drug, why would people want to make it legal? A recent editorial of the *New York Times* is in favour of legalising the drug. It asked the US federal government to remove the ban, arguing that marijuana is “far less dangerous” than alcohol, which is freely available in society to adults. It did not go so far as to suggest that marijuana does not damage health, but said, “We believe that the evidence is overwhelming that **addiction** and dependence are relatively minor problems, especially compared with alcohol and tobacco.” It contends that “moderate use of marijuana does not appear to pose a risk for otherwise healthy adults. There are no perfect answers to people’s legitimate concerns about marijuana use. But neither are there such answers about tobacco or alcohol, and we believe that on every level – health effects, the impact on society and law-and-order issues – the balance falls squarely on the side of national legalisation.”

Time for HK to change?

IN Hong Kong, there were voices asking to decriminalise marijuana as far back as before the handover. In 1994, shortly after a major HK\$60m cannabis seizure by the authorities, High Court judge Mr Justice Kaplan and Appeal Court judge Mr Justice Godfrey came out to **advocate** the legalisation of marijuana, saying that the laws were outdated and do little to stem the use of the drug. Kaplan said the image of cannabis as a dangerous drug was no longer valid, “I am in favour of its decriminalisation. Otherwise, good citizens find themselves on the wrong side of the law and are alienated,” he said. “I am not satisfied that cannabis leads people to take more dangerous drugs, and recent research indicates that it is no more harmful than tobacco. It is certainly less addictive. I don’t advocate anyone takes it - it is a criminal offence. But I do believe something must be done to take away the profit motive from criminals.” He even suggested setting up licensed premises for marijuana consumption as it was easier to control and cut off a major revenue source for criminals.

Zero-tolerance policy

NOT everyone in the West supports legalising the use of marijuana. Peter Bensinger, former US Drug Enforcement Administration administrator and Robert DuPoint, former director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse in the US, are among the opposing voices. They say alcohol and tobacco are already bad enough and wrote that it makes no sense to advocate the “reckless addition of a third drug, marijuana. The best policy to protect public health is one that reduces, not increases, marijuana use. There are plenty of ways to achieve this goal, including a strong public education effort focused on the negative health effects of marijuana.” In Hong Kong, there is no real **prospect** of legalising marijuana. On this issue, the government’s **position** is clear. Commissioner for Narcotics Erika Hui Lam Yin-ming said, “A dangerous drug is a dangerous drug. We have a zero-tolerance policy.”



A woman holds a placard reading “Prohibition equals politicians, banks, justice are all accomplices of the Mafia” as she takes part in a protest to call for the legalisation of marijuana on May 10, 2014 in Paris.

A Basis for Legalisation?



Key ideas

There is growing pressure in the West to legalise marijuana. **Proponents** say the drug is less dangerous than tobacco and alcohol and legalising it would make it easier to control and save users from being stigmatised. But others point out that legalisation would hurt public health and would encourage people to go down the drug-abuse path.

Did you know?

In 2013, the Police and Customs seized 56kg of heroin, 225.8kg of ketamine, 35.1kg of herbal cannabis, 269.3kg of cocaine, 141.5kg of methamphetamine (“ice”) and a total of 10,532 ecstasy-type tablets.

Critical Questions:

1. What is your response to the argument that “since marijuana is less dangerous than tobacco and alcohol, it should be legalised”?
2. Do you think legalising marijuana use would encourage people to abuse other drugs too?

References:

1. Hong Kong’s Narcotic offences
www.police.gov.hk/ppp_en/04_crime_matters/drug/law_pen.html
2. New York Times editorial on legalising marijuana
www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/07/27/opinion/sunday/high-time-marijuana-legalization.html