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Ai Weiwei

1,066 words

Normally, the ordinary people absolutely want to live their life peacefully. But if they are treated improperly and unrighteously, how many people would stand up and ask for the right and equality. Most of the people might fear and hesitate to fight against the ruthless power, but not for the fearless Ai Weiwei. Ai Weiwei's most important contribution to mankind was human rights' activism against his communist government. Ai Weiwei is a Chinese outspoken artist who fights for what he believes, democracy and human rights, although he was always accused and persecuted by the government. Many of his activities and artworks show the negative perspective he had to the government. All of his actions have not been done for himself or specific person but for all of Chinese citizens.

Ai Weiwei was born in the chaotic period of Chinese politics which is called Anti-Rightist Movement.<sup>1</sup> His father, Ai Qing, was a distinguished poet who once worked for the communist party and wrote a poem to praised Mao Zedong. But the year Ai Weiwei was born was the year that his father became the target of the communist government.<sup>2</sup> In 1958, due to his allegoric poetry, Ai Qing and also his family were banished to the labour camp in remote area of China doing insulting works.<sup>3</sup> After 20 years, Ai Qing and

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia contributors. "Anti-Rightist Movement." *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. 26 Dec. 2011. <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Rightist\\_Movement](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Rightist_Movement)>

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia contributors. "Ai Qing." *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. 2 Feb. 2012. <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ai\\_Qing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ai_Qing)>

<sup>3</sup> Lee Ruru. "Obituary: Ai Qing." *The Independent*. 20 May 1996. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-ai-qing-1348347.html>>

his family were acquitted and came back to Beijing.<sup>4</sup> Ai Qing began to fight for the rights of Chinese people. So the conflict between Ai's family and the government has begun since the period of his father. Ai Weiwei's entire life was defined by his father's perspective and persecution. Spending more than a decade in United State studying modern art, Ai Weiwei finally came back to Beijing because of his dying father.<sup>5</sup> He continued his artistic role in China again with other artists publishing 3 illegal books which are called Black Book, White Book and Grey Book. Later he took a photograph of his wife rolling up her skirt in front of Tiananmen Square which was very dangerous because people in that time did not ready to accept a kind of nudity. Ai Weiwei built a studio house in Caochangdi which he later created many of his artworks there.<sup>6</sup> He started creating many architectural and sculptural arts and learning Chinese art to apply with his contemporary art. And as everybody knows about him, he often shows his strong anti-government feeling through his artworks.

In 2008, there was an incident that lead to direct confrontation between Ai Weiwei and the government. An earthquake in Sichuan caused many of school buildings collapsed and many people died. In response, Ai Weiwei collected 9,000 rucksacks of children who died in the earthquake. Then, he covered the frontage of the Museum of Art in Munich with these rucksacks which express the feeling of a grieving mother whose child was killed in the earthquake. Moreover, Ai Weiwei found that hundreds of school collapsed while the other buildings were still stable. The ruins of many school building

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<sup>4</sup> Rachel Cooke. "The interview: Ai Weiwei." *The Guardian*. 6 July 2008.  
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2008/jul/06/art.china>>

<sup>5</sup> Mary-Anne Toy. "The artist as an angry man." *The Age*. 12 Jan. 2008.  
<<http://www.theage.com.au/news/in-depth/the-artist-as-an-angry-man/2008/01/18/1200620207518.html?page=fullpage>>

<sup>6</sup> Aric Chen. "A New Frontier for Chinese Art." *The New York Times*. 1 Apr. 2007.  
<<http://travel.nytimes.com/2007/04/01/travel/01surfacing.html>>

indicated that those schools were not built properly and there was maybe corruption.<sup>7</sup> The government was also trying not to tell the truth. The real number of deaths was kept as secret. Ai Weiwei with his followers began a simple action to hit back the government by finding the name of children who died in the earthquake.<sup>8</sup> Ai Weiwei listed the names of the children into his own blog since the government didn't honestly reveal the number of children. Unfortunately, he lived in the communist world, so his blog was closed by the government.<sup>9</sup>

Ai Weiwei also did artworks that reflected the brutality of Chinese Cultural Revolution and great famine during the period of Chairman Mao Zedong. One of them was Sunflower Seeds exhibited at the Tate's Turbine Hall in 2010. The floor of the hall was covered by over 100 millions of sunflower seeds and the viewers were able to walk and sleep on them.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, all seeds were painted one by one by over 1,600 local artisans for two years. He used sunflower seeds which were once a common food of Chinese people during the Cultural Revolution to demonstrate the harsh lives of his people in the years of suffering and death. Another artwork was Template which was created with wood from the ancient temple in China that the government destroyed in order to build shopping centers. These two contemporary works could express the

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<sup>7</sup> Asia News contributors. "Sichuan: corruption alleged in collapse of school on 9,000 students." *Asia News*. 30 May 2008. <<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Sichuan:-corruption-alleged-in-collapse-of-school-on-9,000-students-12390.html>>

<sup>8</sup> Katherine Grube. "Ai Weiwei Challenges China's Government Over Earthquake." *Art Asia Pacific*. Jul/Aug 2009. <<http://artasiapacific.com/Magazine/64/AiWeiweiChallengesChinasGovernmentOverEarthquake>>

<sup>9</sup> CBC contributors. "China cracks down on outspoken artist." *CBC News*. 12 July 2009. <<http://www.cbc.ca/news/arts/artdesign/story/2009/07/12/aiweiwei-criticism-china.html>>

<sup>10</sup> Adrian Searle. "Tate Modern's sunflower seeds: the world in the palm of your hand." *The Guardian*. 11 Oct. 2010. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2010/oct/11/tate-modern-sunflower-seeds-review>>

cruelty of China's modernization period and also the dictatorship of Chinese political system.

After many times generating heat on political topics, Ai Weiwei became the target of the government, like his father. He was monitored all the time by the security cameras installed in front of his door. Countless ways to stop Ai Weiwei have been done aggressively. In August 2009, after trying to prove that one campaigner was not guilty, Ai Weiwei's hotel room was violently rushed by police.<sup>11</sup> He was beaten and detained until the court finished. Because of this incident, he needed to be operated brain surgery.<sup>12</sup> In November 2011, Ai Weiwei was under house arrest making him unable to join the party at his new studio in Shanghai.<sup>13</sup> Several months later, his studio, without knowing, got crush down.<sup>14</sup> The authorities accused that his studio was built illegally. But the truth is they just want to destroy. Ai Weiwei is now 54 years old and still continuously does his duty to ask for the human rights of Chinese people.

Although at this time Ai Weiwei has not overcome the government yet because the entire government cannot be defeated by just only one man, but in the other hand, his idea was already planted to the new generations which will become the future of country. His actions that exposed the corruption of the government have changed the aspect of people. Chinese citizens and also world people do not spend their lives innocently anymore as long as Ai Weiwei does not stop doing in what he believes. As we can see from the

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<sup>11</sup> Hari Kunzru. "Ai Weiwei: the dissident artist." *The Guardian*. 28 May 2011.

<<http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/ai-weiweis-security-camera-12222011.html>>

<sup>12</sup> Kristen Allen. "Chinese artist gets emergency brain surgery in Munich." *The Local*. 16 Sep. 2009.

<<http://www.thelocal.de/national/20090916-21969.html>>

<sup>13</sup> BBC contributors. "Chinese artist Ai Weiwei says he is under house arrest." *BBC News*. 6 Nov. 2010.

<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-11703775>>

<sup>14</sup> Edward Wong. "Chinese Authorities Raze an Artist's Studio." *The New York Times*. 12 Jan. 2011.

<[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/13/world/asia/13china.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/01/13/world/asia/13china.html?_r=1)>

information above, it emphasizes that Ai Weiwei's most important contribution to mankind was human rights' activism. He has shown the world that the communist government cannot hide the truth from him at all. His movements for human rights have also inspired the young Chinese to realize about their own rights and freedom they deserves in order to make China be the place of democracy in someday.