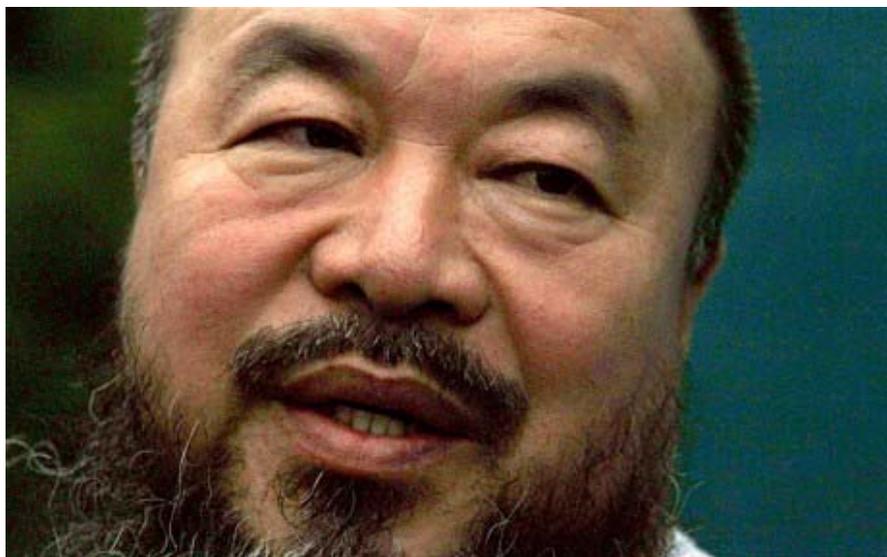


# The Telegraph

## Ai Weiwei was subject to 'immense psychological pressure' in Chinese jail

Ai Weiwei, the dissident Chinese artist who became an international cause célèbre earlier this year, was subjected to "immense psychological pressure" during his three-month detention, being interrogated more than 50 times while under relentless 24-hour surveillance.



Ai WeiWei, the artist and Chinese dissident Photo: REUTERS



By [Peter Foster \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/peter-foster/\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/peter-foster/) , Beijing

11:14PM BST 10 Aug 2011

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In the first account of Mr Ai's ordeal, sources told the Reuters news agency, how the creator of the Tate Modern's Sunflower Seeds exhibition was threatened with a 10-year jail sentence for subversion and verbally intimidated by his interrogators.

The report contradicts the Chinese government claims that he was being investigated for tax evasion.

"What you're doing is illegal," Mr Ai told police officers at one point, according to the source, "They replied: 'Do you know before [the purged former Chinese president] Liu Shaoqi died [under interrogation in 1969], he was holding the constitution ... Talk about illegality, there's no difference between the country that we are in now and the time of the Cultural Revolution,'" they jeered.

The account, which chimes with the experiences of other dissidents, also alleges that Mr Ai was subjected to unyielding scrutiny, being watched over 24 hours a day often with officers' faces inches from his face.

When contacted by The Daily Telegraph on Wednesday night, Mr Ai said he was unable to comment, citing bail conditions banning him from giving interviews.

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[Ai Weiwei back on Twitter \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/8687270/Ai-Weiwei-back-in-communication-on-Twitter.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/8687270/Ai-Weiwei-back-in-communication-on-Twitter.html)

[Blogger released after Ai Weiwei highlights case \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/8692868/Chinese-blogger-released-after-Ai-Weiwei-highlights-case.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/8692868/Chinese-blogger-released-after-Ai-Weiwei-highlights-case.html)

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The details of his incarceration came on the day China has released a prominent blogger held on subversion charges for six months, a day after his case was highlighted Mr Ai on Twitter, raising hopes that the recent crackdown on dissidents might be easing.

Ran Yunfei, an uncompromising advocate of free speech, was taken away last February as the Chinese authorities responded to the wave of revolutions sweeping the Middle East by arresting and detaining dozens of prominent lawyers, bloggers and activists.

Mr Ran's release was confirmed by his wife, Wang Wei, although friends said that he had been released into six months of "residential surveillance", a form of house arrest in which his movements and contacts are strictly limited.

Pu Zhiqiang, a prominent rights lawyer and friend of Mr Ran's said he was hopeful that the release could herald a slight unclenching of the fist in China's security apparatus.

"Exercising control over these people showed the authorities' fear of the democratic revolutions in the northern Africa," Mr Pu told the Associated Press. "Now that they have been released, it could mean that this wave of social control is slowly loosening or gradually receding." Mr Ran's release comes as Mr Ai appeared to be heading once again for a possible confrontation with the authorities.

On Tuesday Mr Ai used his recently reactivated Twitter account to speak out in support of Mr Ran and another dissident, Wang Lihong, a 56-year-old woman who was arrested in March for protesting outside the trial of three fellow activists in the southern city of Fuzhou.

The Tweets included allegations that three of his close associates – an assistant, a driver and a designer – had been

"illegally imprisoned" and "suffered great mental abuse and physical torture" as a result of police investigations into his studio's tax affairs.

On Wednesday, Mr Ai showed no sign of quieting down, again posting a Tweet supporting Ms Wang, who is due to go on trial on Friday in Beijing accused of "creating a disturbance", a charge that carries up to five years in jail and which, her lawyer has said, she denies.

"If you have a mother, if you are a woman, if you are a common person, if you don't wish to be disappeared or falsely accused, follow Wang Lihong," urged Mr Ai in a tweet posted on Wednesday morning.

Despite the official ban on Mr Ai giving interviews, he was permitted to give an authorised interview to China's soft-power English Language mouthpiece The Global Times.

The faintly bizarre "six-hour exclusive" interview lurched from the trivial – "I'm having my studio and kitchen painted" – to references to Mr Ai's "more svelte frame", glossing over the irony that it was 80 days in detention that caused the hitherto rotund Mr Ai to lose so much weight.

When the interview did touch on politics, Mr Ai spoke in the kind of formulaic, approved language used by China's propagandists, although he pledged never to give up "fighting injustice".

"Overthrowing the regime through a radical revolution is not the way to solve China's problems," Mr Ai is quoted as saying at one point, "The most important thing is a scientific and democratic political system." The article, which Mr Ai has confirmed is genuine, appears to have been written for international consumption, perhaps in an attempt to show a more reasonable face to the Chinese government. Attempts to post it on the Chinese microblogging site Sina Weibo were deleted by censors.

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