

Ai weiwei: more than just an artist

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From the Sichuan earthquake To art and twitter: Ai Weiwei, more than just an artist 1

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2 Introduction: the Sichuan Earthquake On the 12th may 2008 in the Sichuan province, a devastating earthquake with a magnitude of 8 on Richter’s scale occurs during the afternoon (Fawu Wang, 2009). According to an official report, 69’197 people were killed, 374’176 injured and 4. 8 Million were left homeless.

Although earthquake predictions remain in a certain way always random, a scientist named Chen Xuezhong brought in 2002 evidence of a potential coming earthquake in the region (Zhiyue, 2010). It stresses that China’s government was warned of a potential coming disaster. After this short introduction, this essay will focus on the repercussions of this incident, in China as well as internationally, emphasised by Ai Weiwei’s actions through, on one hand art and on the other Internet, respectively twitter. Ai Weiwei’s Communication Tools

The Sichuan earthquake raised strong criticism against the Chinese government, especially because of the huge number of victims among children. According to a construction engineer who published the Chinese book "Book Blade": "School construction in China is the worst" (Li, 2008). Indeed, they are often called "tofu construction". Several reasons cover this problematic. Among them, the tiny budgets in poor areas. This is why we find infrastructure deficits in those regions (Li, 2008). Indeed this event has raised interest and the one of a particularly renowned artist, named Ai Weiwei.

In his documentary "Never sorry" Ai Weiwei explains he pursued an independent personal investigation on this accident; he wanted to find out how many children had been killed and wanted to sue the government for their deaths, because according to him, it didn't face its responsibilities. Furthermore he reveals the difficulties encountered, due to the government's restricted information policy, to obtain the official number of children victims (Klayman, 2012). Thus, supported by helpless parents, depressed because of their loss, he gathered the names of an important number of children killed so that they could be remembered (Helmhirst, 2012). "Remembering" Ai Weiwei is an international renowned artist with strong beliefs and personal views. As a matter of fact, he likes to use his world reputation to make the public opinion aware of the problems the Chinese population is facing because of the communist party and has always been a great defender of their rights. The Sichuan earthquake would have been hidden and forgotten in the government's propaganda, but thanks to him and to his art creation, those students' life will never be forgotten.

Remembering” is a piece of art created by Ai Weiwei on the wall of the “ Haus der Kunst” in Munich. Made with 9’000 schoolbags (McMahon, 2010), it symbolises the life of the students who died during the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan. Different colours have been chosen to decorate the schoolbags, in order to read the following phrase, written with Chinese characters, on the wall of the “ Haus der Kunst”: “ She lived happily for seven years in this world” (Branigan, 2011).

This sentence, pronounced by the poor mother of a victim, shows how sad and tragic this accident has been. Through this artistic work and its exposition in a cultural centre like Munich, Ai Weiwei has been able to export local Chinese problems to the rest of the world and make us aware of the repressed liberty of expression and the lack of assistance to the population in China Province, especially when it comes to people living in poor areas. In addition it expresses Ai Weiwei’s beliefs by showing us that he holds the government responsible for those high casualties.

Twitter Ai Weiwei uses twitter and Internet to share his views and assess his notoriety. This tool became an essential part of Ai Weiwei’s style of communication. During the Sichuan earthquake, twitter has been used to make the people aware of the damages caused and to reveal whom Ai Weiwei holds responsible for this incident. People outside China could be informed. On the opposite, people living in the mainland of China have a restricted access to Internet, respectively twitter.

Still, there are some ways to deviate from the, imposed by government, restrictedfreedom of speech; although the use of Internet is limited, some people in China use a VPN located outside of China to communicate within

the mainland (A digital rallying cry, 2011). Thus the government's politic, this doesn't bother Ai Weiwei who's an active twitter user, sharing his thoughts almost daily (Twitter Ai Weiwei). As a precursor of twitter in China, Ai Weiwei considerably influenced the style of communication and the liberty of expression of Chinese people.

Effectively, the following example highlights clearly those facts: when Ai Weiwei was in detention, a lot of his followers shared twitts almost every day for his liberation and manifested in the streets with the famous slogan: "Free Ai Weiwei" (Twitter Free Ai Weiwei). This shows the considerable impact he has on Chinese society. Going Local to Global The repercussions of the Sichuan earthquake can be characterised by the influence of the westerncultureon the Chinese population through Ai Weiwei, respectively art and twitter.

As a matter of fact Ai Weiwei has studied art both in Beijing and in New York (Wines, 2009); this certainly allowed him to draw comparisons between the Occidental and the Asian culture and to figure out which changes were to be made in the Chinese politics, for example regarding the freedom of speech. Indeed from a local incident and thanks to an international renowned artist, a positive anger in the Chinese population, against the government, has raised to fight for their rights and to freely express their opinions.

Effectively, it is to be underlined that the use of twitter by the Chinese population is a relevant example for this characterisation. Conclusion In the light of these factors the Sichuan earthquake emphasises the infrastructure deficit the country is facing in Province and more importantly in poor areas. Secondly, "Remembering" is the symbol of the anger and the sadness Ai <https://assignbuster.com/ai-weiwei-more-than-just-an-artist/>

Weiwei and the parents face regarding respectively the government and this tragic accident. Thirdly, twitter highlights a communication tool, which can easily and instantly be used. Ai Weiwei through a combination of these tools positively influenced the Chinese people. Although it may seem somehow utopic, Ai Weiwei with "Remembering" and twitter made a huge step forward, by making a population aware how to use their rights, in the fight he struggles with the government of mainland China. Hereby, I declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work. 6 7