

Chinese Dissident Artist Ends Yearlong Probation
By: Edward Wong, The New York Times
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BEIJING — Ai Weiwei, the Chinese rebel artist, said Thursday that his one-year probation had ended but that the police had told him he could not leave China because of continuing investigations.

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Mr. Ai said the probation, which followed his release last June from 81 days of detention overseen by the Beijing police, ended Thursday morning with a handshake between him and an officer at a police station in Beijing. Mr. Ai said that in theory he could now travel outside the capital.

His supporters said Mr. Ai had been detained for political reasons: he is one of the most vocal critics of the Communist Party.

“They told me they had lifted the probation because I had behaved well all year,” he said in a telephone interview as he was dining at a restaurant in Beijing’s Sanlitun neighborhood. “It really surprised me because I violated almost every rule they imposed.”

Before Mr. Ai was released from detention last year, the police said he had to refrain from talking to foreign journalists and could not use Twitter. But Mr. Ai regularly talks to journalists and uses Twitter daily.

Mr. Ai said the police did not give him back his passport. “You don’t need it,” Mr. Ai quoted one officer as saying. The officer then said that on Monday the police would return the passport and computer equipment they had seized.

During Mr. Ai’s time in detention, the police interrogated him on the sale value of his artwork, and officials later said Mr. Ai owed \$2.4 million in back taxes and penalties. Mr. Ai sued the tax authorities in a Beijing court, but he was barred from attending the first hearing on Wednesday. He said Thursday that there had been no results at the end of the hearing.

Mr. Ai said the police officers he met with on Thursday morning told him that they were still conducting investigations related to pornography, illegal exchange of foreign currency and bigamy. Mr. Ai has denied all the accusations. The first two matters are related to two of Mr. Ai’s art projects, and the bigamy accusation refers to his 3-year-old son from an extramarital relationship.

Despite those accusations, Mr. Ai said the police were polite to him and urged him to be a “good citizen.”

“You have to think about your family and your child,” Mr. Ai said one officer told him.

“Personally, we think you’re a good person,” the officer said. “Your roots are red, and your branches look good.”

That line, from a Mao-era slogan, referred to the fact that Mr. Ai’s father was Ai Qing, a poet who was respected by Mao but persecuted during the Cultural Revolution.

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