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IMMIGRATION LAWYER AND HER ASSISTANT FOUND GUILTY OF VISA FRAUD

(HOUSTON, TX) - A federal jury has convicted a Houston immigration attorney of conspiracy and fraud arising from a scheme in which false and fraudulent documents were filed with visa applications to permit foreign nationals to enter and remain in the United States, United States Attorney Don DeGabrielle announced today.

Yali Huang, 44, the attorney, convicted of all counts alleged against her -- conspiracy and four counts of visa fraud -- was immediately ordered into federal custody following the return of the verdicts. Huang's assistant, Yongping "Mary" Liu, 49, tried along with Huang, was convicted of one count of visa fraud and acquitted on the four other counts. She, too, was immediately ordered into federal custody following her conviction. Both women will remain in custody pending a May 16, 2007 sentencing hearing. The guilty verdicts were returned on Tuesday, February 13, 2007, after more than two weeks of trial and approximately twenty hours of deliberation.

"We will investigate anyone who files false petitions to circumvent the federal immigration laws," said Robert Rutt, the Special Agent in Charge of the Houston office of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the lead agency involved in the investigation of this case. "And continue to work closely with our law enforcement partners to identify those who choose to exploit our systems."

The Law Office of Yali Huang first came to the attention of federal law enforcement when immigration officials observed fraud indicators in numerous visa applications the Law Office submitted. Confidential sources also informed law enforcement that the Law Office of Yali Huang was known in the Houston Chinese community to file fraudulent visa applications

During the course of a two and a half week trial, at which federal agents and former clients of Yali Huang testified, the United States presented evidence which showed two main parts to the visa fraud scheme that Huang operated for approximately five years beginning in April 2000 through 2005.

The first part of the fraud scheme involved applications to extend B1 visas. B1 visas are visas that allow foreign citizens to come to the United States for a short time period and conduct business on behalf of a foreign employer. Huang submitted more than 200 applications to extend B1 visas on behalf of foreign citizens, which included a supporting letter purportedly from the applicant's Chinese employer. With respect to the six applications that were the focus of the trial, the evidence showed that the Law Office's practice was to draft the supporting letters that supposedly came from Chinese companies and then have the aliens forge the signatures of their supposed boss on the supporting letter. In addition, Yali Huang filed at least three B1 extension applications with letters purportedly from Chinese businesses saying their employee was conducting business in the United States with a company called Ultra Controls. The evidence proved that Ultra Controls was a company created by Huang and her husband and that the aliens, in fact, never conducted business with Ultra Controls or with Huang's husband. The evidence further showed that after the execution of a federal search warrant at the Law Office in September 2004, Huang asked the Chinese nationals whose applications mentioned Ultra Controls to sign false affidavits stating that they had done business with her husband's company.

The second part of the scheme involved employment-based visas, which U.S. employers file to bring foreign citizens into the United States as employees. One type of these visas allows foreign citizens to enter the United States and work as employees of an American subsidiary of a foreign company. The evidence at trial established that Huang participated in a scheme to file such visa petitions fraudulently both showing that an American company was the subsidiary of a Chinese company and that the Chinese national would be coming to work in a managerial position for the American company. Ping Lee Cohen, a co-conspirator who has pled guilty and testified during the trial, received tens of thousands of dollars from Chinese nationals to assist them in obtaining permanent resident status in the United States. Cohen then recruited American businesses to be used in the scheme. According to the testimony of two business owners at trial, they were told that their company would be "sponsoring" a Chinese national, but were not told that a false representation would be made to the government that their company had been purchased by a Chinese company.

Cohen then hired the Law Office of Yali Huang to file visa petitions for the American companies falsely showing that the American companies had been purchased by Chinese companies. Yali Huang filed these visa petitions along with fraudulent stock certificates, Board of Director meeting minutes, and other corporate documents that the Law Office created to falsely show a sale of the American company to a Chinese company. Cohen testified that once the Law Office created these fraudulent documents, she would go to the Law Office and forge the signatures of the company owners on the documents falsely showing the sale to a Chinese company. The trial focused on eight such petitions that Huang filed. Huang received her usual legal fees for filing such petitions.

Both Huang and Liu, who are lawful permanent residents of the United States, face up to ten years imprisonment for their respective visa fraud convictions, and are subject to deportation upon their release from prison. Huang also faces up to five years

imprisonment on the conspiracy conviction. All counts of conviction also carry a maximum fine of \$250,000.

The investigation leading to the charges in this case was conducted by the Houston office of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Citizenship and Immigration Service Fraud Detention Unit at the Texas Service Center, the Department of Labor Office of Inspector General, with assistance from the United States Postal Inspection Service. The case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Gregg Costa and Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Jason Varnado.

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