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News Release

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Three convicted for their role in marriage fraud operation; 21 others have pleaded guilty

Three individuals were convicted yesterday by a federal jury for their roles in a massive marriage fraud operation that was centered in the Twin Cities.

On Dec. 22 in St. Paul after less than two hours of deliberation, a jury found Mingwen Yang, 26, unknown address; Guangping Lin, 29, unknown address; and Yanxia Tang, 24, unknown address; each guilty on one count of conspiracy to commit marriage fraud and one count of aiding and abetting marriage fraud. The three were indicted on April 15, along with 40 other defendants.

The operation involved the recruitment of United States citizens to enter into fraudulent marriages with Chinese nationals in order for the Chinese nationals to obtain visas and other immigration benefits. Between 2002 and November 2007 the defendants did conspire with each other and others to enter into marriages between Chinese citizens and U.S. citizens for the purpose of evading U.S. immigration laws.

“America’s legal immigration system is not for sale and we will move aggressively against those who compromise the integrity of that system to enrich themselves,” said Claude Arnold, special agent in charge for the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) office of investigations in Bloomington. “Marriage fraud, like all other types of immigration benefit fraud, poses a potential security threat because it creates a vulnerability which illegal aliens, criminals, and terrorists can exploit in an effort to remain in this country.”

“The goal of this conspiracy was for individuals to profit by assisting Chinese nationals in illegally obtaining visas and other immigration benefits,” said U.S. Attorney Frank J. Magill. “These convictions and plea agreements prove that the lies and deceit used by some to violate our nation’s immigration laws won’t be tolerated, and that we will maintain the integrity of our nation’s borders by prosecuting these types of crimes.”

Two of the men who arranged these fraudulent marriages were sentenced in September each on one count of conspiracy to profit financially from arranging, facilitating and participating in fraudulent marriages. Le Guo Wu, 31, Philadelphia, Penn., was sentenced to 30 months in prison and three years supervised release. Houa Vang, 24, St. Paul, was sentenced to 12 months and one day in prison along with two years supervised release.

The 21 defendants who have already pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy are: Nou Chang, 25, St. Paul; Kaneeka Chanthavong, 25, Brooklyn Park; Vang Her, 26, St. Paul; Andmire Kissluv Lee, 28, St. Paul; Chee Chengshua Lee, 25, Brooklyn Center; Chue Dou Vang, 30, Mankato; David Ku Vang, 30, Maplewood; Pao Vang, 25, St. Paul; Falamena Vue, 22, St. Paul; Annie Pafoua Xiong, 24, Oakdale; Tou Kao Xiong, 24, Fridley; Toua Xiong, 27, St. Paul; Cheng Yang, 28, South St. Paul; Chue Yang, 24, St. Paul; Joe Yang, 27, Minneapolis; Koua Yang, 22, St. Paul; Thomas Yang, 25, Walnut Grove; Lyfoung Yang, 26, Brooklyn Center; Soua Vang, 28, Woodbury; Kao Vang, 28, St. Paul; and Tou Kao Yang, 27, Brooklyn Park.

The other 19 defendants indicted have yet to make their initial appearances in federal court.

According to the respective plea agreements, the object of the conspiracy was to facilitate entry into and residence within the U.S. by Chinese nationals (the beneficiaries) through fraudulent marriages to U.S. citizens (the petitioners). The petitioners would travel to China on one or more occasions to facilitate the unlawful entry of the Chinese nationals into the U.S. The petitioners received up to \$25,000, minus their travel expenses to and from China, in exchange for their participation in the marriage fraud scheme.

Chinese beneficiaries paid to participate in the scheme to secure fraudulent entry into the U.S., and the purported relationship between a petitioner and beneficiary was documented with “sham” evidence designed to give the appearance of a legitimate pre-marital relationship.

The plea agreements state that if a beneficiary successfully made entry into the U.S., the petitioner and beneficiary would often participate in a civil marriage ceremony to cause issuance of a marriage license. Neither before nor after the marriage license was issued did the petitioner and beneficiary enter into a bona fide marital relationship.

The three convicted defendants were each Chinese nationals who entered into sham marriages with U.S. citizens in order to fraudulently obtain U.S. visas. They each face a potential maximum penalty of five years in prison on the conspiracy count and five years on the aiding and abetting marriage fraud count. The defendants who pleaded to one count of conspiracy each face a potential maximum penalty of five years in prison. U.S. District Court Judge Paul Magnuson will determine their sentences at a future date.

This case is the result of an investigation by ICE-Document and Benefit Fraud Task Force, which includes the U.S. Secret Service and U.S. Department of State’s Diplomatic Security Service and the Hennepin County Sheriff’s Office. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys LeeAnn K. Bell and David M. Genrich.