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Stanford Classmates Send Letter to Rice for Jude Shao's Release

BY Mei-hui Huang

Stanford—A group of Jude Shao's Stanford classmates recently sent a letter to the new Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice who was formerly a provost and a professor of politics at Stanford University. They believe that as the Secretary of State in whose position pressures can be exerted most influentially, Ms. Rice, who has had experience in securing the release of other Asian prisoners before, would be able to regain the freedom for Jude Shao.

Jude Shao, a 42 year old American citizen who is in his sixth year being incarcerated in Shanghai Qing Pu prison, received a 16-year sentence in China on charges of "falsely issuing VAT invoices and tax evasion". His American passport did not shield him from Chinese jail. Five classmates of the Stanford MBA class of '93, including Chuck Hoover, Cynthia Dai and others, have been leading the classmates in their efforts to free Jude Shao for five years. They have set up a website www.freejudeshao.com for their campaign.

Cynthia Dai, who was born in America, says that the latest development was that Jude Shao received a Notice of Rejection of Appeal from the Supreme People's Court of China on January 31. This is a formal reply from China's highest court and it means "they have reached the end of their legal pursuit". However, after many years of campaigning, they have learned to view Jude Shao's case from the political and diplomatic perspectives and felt they need to redouble their efforts. And Secretary of State Ms. Rice is their new hope.

Cynthia Dai says the date of the court's notice was November 22 of last year. "It is an interesting date", she says. Urged by Congresswomen Zoe Lofgren and Anna Eshoo and Congressman Michael Honda, among others, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs James A. Kelly raised Jude Shao's case with senior Chinese official last November during the APEC meetings in Chile. A reporter from a main U.S. newspaper has also verified this fact.

APEC meetings ended on November 21, one day before the date of the notice. Yet Jude Shao was handed the notice more than two months later. The classmates believe there must be something unusual for this. It could be viewed from a positive or negative perspective, which the classmates find hard to decipher.

On the other hand, a Pakistani prisoner who was imprisoned on fraud charges and spent several years with Jude Shao, was recently released from Shanghai Qing Pu prison after sentence reduction due to his acknowledgment of the crime and acceptance of the verdict. He tells the classmates that Jude Shao is suffering from a heart ailment which is deteriorating and his health and spirits are worrisome.

Cynthia Dai says that Jude Shao doesn't want to accept the verdict in order to get sentence reduction. On charges of tax evasion in the amount of about US\$ 393,000, Jude Shao insists that

the witnesses' testimonies were contradictory, that the court did not account for all the tax payments, that the police fabricated the confessions, that a lawyer was only allowed ten days before the trial. After the conviction, he appealed the case and submitted the new evidence asking for a retrial.

On January 31 he received the Notice of Rejection of Appeal which listed the following as the reasons for rejection: "First, the original verdict has had clear facts and sufficient evidence to prove that you have committed the crime of Falsely Issuing VAT Invoices", "Second, your action did constitute the crime of Falsely Issuing VAT invoices." "Further, the three so-called 'new evidence' supplied by you can 'not overturn the criminal facts of Falsely Issuing VAT Invoices determined by the trial court in the original verdict.'" The notices say that the three pieces of new evidence submitted by Jude Shao lacked relevancy so the court does accept them.

Cynthia Dai says although they knew the possibility of getting a retrial was extremely low, it was still very disappointing to see this notice of rejection. In the last few years, they have asked for help from president Bush, former Secretary of State Colin Powell and senior Congressional leaders. And yet they still have not got their classmate out of the four--storey cell--block dedicated for the foreign prisoners inside Shanghai Qing Pu prison. Secretary Rice is their new hope. Jude Shao's old classmate, Caroline Pappajohn, who had taken a course taught by then Professor Rice in 1998 at Stanford, drafted the letter. AU five organizers of the class '93 Campaign Signed the letter. "We hope Dr. Rice will meet us and let us present Jude Shao's case to her," Says Cynthia Dai, "We will make every effort possible to get Jude Shao back early for medical treatment. We don't want him to spend another ten years in jail."