

Public Letter from the Zhang Family dated August 28, 2017¹

Friends and Fellow Chinese,

Greetings!

After the media briefing on August 22, we the family felt the sincere care and attention from the society, which filled us with gratitude and throb. In the meantime, we learned from each channel that the public has many doubts, which requests more detailed information. As we presented in the in the media briefing, without everybody's support and encouragement, we cannot embrace ourselves till today. So, we are obliged to report the recent experiences of the family, future plans, the arrangement for the donations bequest to us, and other information. Thusly, in this letter, we collect eleven questions most asked, provide explanations as detailed as possible.

Question One: How was the GoFundMe donation account established?

The GoFundMe donation account was set up before the family going to the States. When the University of the Illinois ("UIUC" or the University) learned that the family suffers poverty, the GoFundMe donation account was established according to the suggestions by Robin Kaler, the vice president of the UIUC, and was assisted by the U of I Credit Union ("Credit Union") for the family.

Question Two: How does the family withdraw funds from the donation account?

With the help of two attorneys, David Theis, Esq. and Roaa Al-Heeti, Esq., a trust account was set up to receive donations from the GoFundMe. This trust account has three directors overseeing the use of the funds. The three directors are David Theis, Esq., a Champaign local attorney, Greg Anderson, a manager of the Credit Union, and Guofang Miao, a Post-Ph.D. of the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences at UIUC. Any expenses from this account requires the consent and signature of the director, including the cost of rental property, attorney's fees and so on. This strict procedure warrants reasonable uses for the donations.

Question Three: What are the purposes of GoFundMe donation?

The principle purpose of the fundraising project is to help the family cover any costs associated with the search for Yingying Zhang, which includes a tip reward, travelling expenses, printing expenses and expenses for hiring experts and private detectives that is on the table, etc. Secondly, the donation covers all the attorney's fees. Currently, some attorneys provide *pro bono* legal aids, such as Zhidong Wang, Esq. and Steve Beckett, Esq., and an attorney charges a fee, such as Roaa Al-Heeti, Esq. In the meanwhile, it is estimated that the case will last for 1-2 years or even longer, which means more costs required for legal fees. Thirdly, the donation covers the living expenses of the family in U.S., including the cost of the house rental, meals and so on. Fourthly, the donation will support the future living expenses of Yingying's parents financially. Yingying is the only member of the family who ever went to college. She carries too much care

1 (Added by Translators) The Translators waive any and all copyright claims on this translation. Some sentence that read weird, because the Translators tries to retain the original tongue in the Public Letter.

and hope from her parents. The family's future is completely changed after this disaster. Her parents cannot work during their stay in U.S. They cannot go back to work and normal life, even after found Yingying, especially her father is a truck driver that requires utter attention. Besides, Yingying always strives to provide her family a better life from poverty.

After thoroughly grasp the case and the family's situation, UIUC suggested to the family to revise and perfect the purpose for fundraising. Thusly, the family updated the statement on GoFundMe with the assistant of the University a while ago.

It need to be emphasized that, despite many intended uses of the donation, the principle use of the donation fund at present is to search for Yingying. We will not keep any donations for any other purposes before found Yingying, including financially supporting the future lives of Yingying's parents. Meanwhile, we will economize as much as possible to save for searching at other aspects, such as living expenses.

Question Four: Why the target amount of Gofundme.com campaign is elevated to \$500,000?

It has been two months and a half since the incidence happened. FBI makes few progress in finding Yingying, not even finding any important leads. The family is planning and preparing to hire private detectives, experts in related field and searching teams to find Yingying. However, the Zhang family does not start such works for two reasons. Firstly, the family respects the investigation conducted by FBI, and does not want to interfere such ongoing investigation. Secondly, the fund raised now is still far short for the aforementioned search.

Thusly, according to the mutual agreement by the family and UIUC, we decided to elevate the target amount of the fund-raising, for the main purpose of gaining the capacity to continue searching for Yingying even after FBI stops working on such, till Yingying is found. According

to the estimate of Kelly Ayers² with American Cold Case Center³ and Shiquan Liu⁴, a domestic criminal investigation expert, the cost of such search shall be \$500,000 to \$1,000,000.

Member of the family had since attempted to contact experts in related field and detectives. However, due to the complexity of this case, not an ordinary private detective is competent. An expert with extensive experience in the area of criminal investigation is needed. We have contacted with Dr. Henry C. Lee. But he is unavailable for direct investigation due to jurisdiction limitations, that without an invitation from FBI, it would be *ultra vires* for Dr. Lee to participate in direct investigation. Currently, we are still searching and contacting other detectives and experts.

Question Five: What is the current usage of the GoFundMe donation?

Items	Amount (USD)	Illustration
Visa and Passport (In China)	$30*3+162*5 = 900$	3 Passports (Zhang's parents and bother), 5 Visas (Zhang's parent, brother, aunt and boyfriend) ⁵
Train tickets (in China)	$97.5*4 = 390$	4 tickets from Nanping, Fujian to Beijing

2 (Added by Translators) Brief introduction of Professor Kelly Ayers, see <http://forensics.wvu.edu/faculty-and-staff/faculty/kelly-ayers>, date of visit: September 3, 2017. Professor Ayers said that,

“I was associated at the time of the meeting with a group called the Cold Case Investigative Research Institute based in Atlanta, GA which is different than what is being referenced here. The fact that I indicated I was part of a group who could be of assistance is not false; it's simply not the same group associated with Dr. Henry Lee and the University of New Haven. I am no longer associated with CCIRI, but they may still be available to assist the family when that time comes. I did not quote any amounts that it would cost to conduct an investigation to the family during the meeting. That amount could be a completely reasonable request, but the family must be able to support that figure based on their anticipated needs and the expected duration of that need. *** I want to make sure it is clear that I did not assist in any way with the calculation of that amount.”

3 (Added by Translators) “The American Cold Case Center” might be the Cold Case Center at the Henry C. Lee Institute of Forensic Science with the University of New Haven. See

http://www.henryleeinstitute.com/?page_id=17, date of visit: September 3, 2017. There is no Kelly Ayers working for the Institution per Fellows & Advisors List.

4 (Added by Translators) Dr. Shiquan Liu was a visiting scholar at Northwestern University, who is post-Ph.D. candidate with Institute of Evidence Law and Forensic Science at Chinese University of Political Science and Law. See <http://zjkxyjy.cupl.edu.cn/zh/node/910>, date of visit: September 3, 2017. He denied made an estimate of the fund needed for the search. However, he does not wish this to be used against the Zhangs.

5 (Added by Translators) Passport processing fee for the first-time applicant is 200 RMB (30.58 USD, based on the exchange rate of RMB to USD on Sep. 4th, 2017); the visa application fee for non-immigration visa applicable for Yingying's families (B or U visa) and boyfriend (B visa) is 160 USD per application, the difference between the visa fee claimed in this statement (162 USD) and the visa application fee listed on the official website of U.S. Department of State (<https://travel.state.gov/content/visas/en/fees/fees-visa-services.html>) could be due to the change in exchange rate or additional fee collected by U.S. Embassy in Beijing.

		(for Zhang's parent, brother and aunt) ⁶
Airline tickets (in China)	557 *3 = 1,671	3 tickets from Beijing to Chicago (Zhang's father, aunt and boyfriend. The tickets for mother and brother were waived by Hainan Airline)
Tip Rewards (in U.S.)	50,000	Managed by Champaign County Crime Stoppers ⁷
Attorney's fee (in U.S.)	4,815	Attorney's fee for Roaa Al-Heeti ⁸
Fees for printing (in U.S.)	2,100	Printing materials for finding Yingying Zhang events and rallies
Transportation (in U.S.)	1,000 ⁹	Transportation fees for funding Yingying Zhang
Rent (in U.S.)	1,100*7 = 7,700	Six-months rent and the deposit
Network (in U.S.)	45*6+100+60 = 430	Six-months service and \$100 deposit, with \$60 installation fee
Catering (in U.S.)	700	
Commodity (in U.S.)	300	
Total	70,006	

Major daily expenses of Zhang's family ¹⁰since the last two and half months are shown on the above table. So far, \$148,296 has been collected in the GoFundMe donation account. GoFundMe collects a tax at 8.5%, a.k.a. \$12,605. For the rest donations, besides the tips reward

6 (Added by Translators) The price for a soft sleeper ticket for train K46 (from Nanping to Beijing) is 640 RMB (97.85 USD, based on the exchange rate of RMB to USD on Sep. 4th, 2017), consistent with the price claimed in the statement (97.5 USD).

7 (Added by Translators) More information available on <http://373tips.com/sitemenu.aspx?ID=397&>.

8 (Added by Translators) The attorney's fee claimed in this statement is for the service provided by Ms. Roaa Al-Heeti, Esq. for setting up the trust account for donation.

9 This amount could purchase enough gasoline for 10 to 40 thousand miles. Beside, volunteers probably provided rides to the family free of charge. So is the problem with fees for printing.

10 (Added by Translators) In the original statement in Chinese, it is clearly stated that the costs were spent by the families (家人). It is commonly accepted that boyfriend is not classified as families (家人) and it is reasonable to assume that the costs spent by Xiaolin Hou, Yingying's boyfriend, should not be covered by the fund raised via GoFundMe, either based on the statement released by Yingying's family or based on the story post on GoFundMe, in which it is clearly stated that the fund will be used to support Yingying's family instead of "family and boyfriend". Some of the listed costs, however, were spent by Xiaolin Hou, including the visa fee and airfare, and some of the list costs can be assumed to be spent, at least partially, for Xiaolin Hou's benefit and welfare, including the rent, internet service, dining and grocery costs. If such costs were provided from Yingying's families to Xiaolin Hou in exchange of his service for Yingying's services, it is possible that this "employment" has violated the labor and immigration law enforced in the United States. If such costs were provided from Yingying's families to Xiaolin Hou as a gift, instead of the payment for his services, such non-cash income of Xiaolin Hou may be taxable and therefore should be reported to IRS, and such gifting should not be covered by the fund raised via GoFundMe as it is not related to Yingying's case.

of \$50,000, \$10,515¹¹ has been spent for other purposes. The remaining outgoings were either advanced by Zhang's family or remained unpaid¹².

In addition to the above details, several personal expenses, including the accommodation and catering at Beijing when applying for the visas and medication and medical insurance for Yingying's mother, were paid by Zhang's family themselves. These expenses shall not be paid from GoFundMe donation account.

Question Six: How would the usage of the GoFundMe donation be published?

We are preparing to open a blog for updating instantly the usage of donations, and to respond to important posts from GoFundMe. The link to is blog will be posted on the Finding Yingying Website (<https://findingyingying.github.io>) and GoFundMe donation page (<https://www.gofundme.com/missing-u-of-i-scholar>). The usage of the donation, bank statement, receipts and contracts will be posted on the blog.

Question Seven: Why hire Zhidong Wang, Esq. and Roaa Al-Heeti, Esq. to provide services for the family?

Someone questions the intent of the family to immigrate to the U.S.A. because both Ms. Al-Heeti, Esq. and Mr. Wang, Esq.'s practices include immigration services. This is absurd. Mr. Wang, Esq. is an attorney of Chinese heritage, recommended by the Chinese General Consulate at Chicago and domestic foreign Chinese population authorities. He is very experienced in providing legal aid to Chinese overseas. Whereas Ms. Al-Heeti, Esq. is a famous attorney recommended by UIUC, soon after the family arrived at Champaign, who primarily help the family set up trust account for the donation. From the beginning, the family never consult with them for any questions besides this case.

Question Eight: How did the family come to U.S.A.?

Yingying's family was made aware of her missing on June 10. Then we got in touch with the Chinese Consulate and the University officials. After heard the news, Yingying's mother had passed out several times, suffered loss of sleep and appetite. Her health has declined dramatically. Therefore, Yingying's younger brother stayed home taking care of their mother. Yingying's father, along with her aunt, went to Beijing for their visas on June 12. Since Yingying's family have never been abroad and does not know any English, Yingying's boyfriend is needed to accompany and help them. Hence, Yingying's father, aunt, and boyfriend received their visas on June 16 with the bless of the Consulate. They arrived in Chicago by air on June 19.

11 (Added by Translators) It can be assumed from the context that the 10,515 USD other costs should refer to the cost listed in the table. However, there is no combination of the itemized costs listed in the table that corresponds to the subtotal of 10,515 USD.

12 (Added by Translators) It is reasonable to assume that the unpaid costs and costs paid in advance by the families are also listed in the table. However, as the items covered by the 10,515 USD mentioned in footnote 6 are not explicitly listed, the items referred here as unpaid costs and costs paid in advance are unknown.

During these more than 2 months' time, Yingying's mother hoped at every second to come to the U.S.A. sooner to look for her daughter. However, she was too weak to do so. For a while, she is even too weak to walk. In the meantime, she spent a lot of time on the road: she went from Nanping, Fujian to Beijing applied for her visa, flew from Beijing to Chicago, and then was driven to Champaign. Therefore, Yingying's mother has been trying very hard to remain healthy in preparation to come to the U.S.A. Finally, in recent times, her health permitted to travel to Beijing along with Yingying's younger brother on August 12 for their visas, and arrived in the U.S.A. on August 19.

Question Nine: How long does the family plan to stay in the States?

The cost of living in U.S. is very high. We hope to save more money in searching of Yingying. Hence, after Yingying's mother arrived in the States, Yingying's aunt had gone back to China on August 27. Other family members might go back to China later.

However, we plan to have at least one family member in U.S. till Yingying is found. Reason one is to urge and cooperate with the search, for example, FBI met with the family several times to gain information regarding Yingying for investigation and evidence; reason two is to meet the needs during trial, for example, plea bargain could happen anytime that would require the participation of the family member. In the meanwhile, we should use whatever possible ways to continue the search for Yingying.

Question Ten: Is the search for Yingying still going on?

I can answer very affirmatively that we will never stop searching for Yingying until we find her. For now, although the lack of key leads makes it very hard for the search, the local police and FBI are still putting a lot effort to find her whereabouts. If we still haven't located her in future and the law enforcement stop any further effort, we will hire private investigators, specialists, and search groups to continue the search.

In the meantime, family members and local volunteers are conducting search on our own, which has never stopped. We often went out to search campus, park and water areas in Champaign city and its suburb areas, according to the recommendations from experts such as Dr. Henry Chang-Yu Lee. We even went to some lakes on Illinois border. The search in Salem IL, which was covered by the media, is another example. We will pursue every lead and continue this search in future, and never give up.

Question 11. How is the living condition of the family?

We moved out the student dorm at the beginning of August. Few apartments were rented month by month, and was extremely expensive. We finally signed a half-year lease on a house near the campus. It is big enough for the whole families. Many Chinese volunteers from local church brought food for us in the first two months. Yingying's mom started to cook for families after she arrived. We are trying our best not to bother others here anymore. We are saving every penny in our daily expense in order to put more on the search for Yingying.

At last, I want to thank everybody because we would not survive today without your help. We are grateful to those who are always supporting us without hesitation. It gives us strength and confidence, so that we can continue this difficult journey. We are also thankful to those people who gossip and slander us purposely. It brings out justice and fairness from more and more people, which make our team stronger. We will continue to work with law enforcement, embassy, university, social groups, media and so on. We will not give up any hope. We will not reserve any strength. We hope everybody continues to support and supervise us. At this moment, we have no time and energy to be sad, bitter or angry. All we want to do is searching Yingying with every way possible. I am sure we will find her.

I wish everybody all the best.

Ronggao Zhang, Lingfeng Ye, Xinyang Zhang, Liqin Ye, Xiaolin Hou (actual writing)