

Winston & Strawn Forms China Alliance, As McDermott Exits

By **Xiumei Dong**

Law360 (June 24, 2020, 8:29 PM EDT) -- Winston & Strawn LLP has formed a strategic alliance with Shanghai-based law firm Yuanda, replacing McDermott Will & Emery LLP in the more than decadelong partnership, the Chicago firm announced Wednesday.

Yuanda, previously known as MWE China Law Offices, had been in an exclusive alliance with McDermott since 2007. But according to Yuanda's managing partner John Huang, the two firms terminated their collaboration several months ago. Soon after the news broke, Winston & Strawn reached out, asking to join forces.

"We had been in China for a number of years in both Shanghai and Hong Kong, and we realized that our practice in Shanghai, since it did not include [People's Republic of China] qualified lawyers, we couldn't grow it to the size that we needed to provide the depth of breadth," said Tom Fitzgerald, Winston & Strawn's chairman.

Under Chinese law, foreign law firms in China are barred from practicing Chinese law. Therefore, Fitzgerald explained, forming an alliance with Yuanda will allow Winston & Strawn to expand its services to clients in the Chinese market. He added that the firm also plans to enter into a joint operation agreement with Yuanda in the Shanghai Free Trade Zone.

"We think that it's a tremendous opportunity to serve our clients with what we think is one of the premier if not the premier firm in China," Fitzgerald said.

The new alliance, which is called YuandaWinston, will comprise Winston & Strawn's existing Shanghai office and 47 attorneys from Yuanda. According to Fitzgerald, Winston & Strawn has six practitioners in Shanghai and 20 more attorneys and staff in Hong Kong. The firm closed its Beijing and Taipei offices in 2017.

"The China market seemed to grow quickly. We're thinking about the post-pandemic situation. I think China is very well situated," Huang said. "With Winston's reputation and capabilities in the United States in Europe ... we can offer more services to our clients with this new platform."

Huang, who has more than 20 years of experience advising companies on cross-border transactions, is leading the effort in the alliance for Yuanda.

He is joined by investigations partner Leon Liu and corporate partner Kevin Qian, both of whom also were part of the MWE China Law Offices launch team that left AllBright Law Offices with Huang in 2007. Michelle Gon, who joined the team in 2016 as a partner with McDermott, will also join Winston & Strawn as a partner.

In a statement to Law360, McDermott confirmed ending the alliance with Yuanda.

"We will continue to support our clients' strategic business objectives in the region through our strong partner network in Asia," a McDermott spokesperson said.

--Editing by Stephen Berg.