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Chinatown travel agent Vivian Cheng charged in scheme to defraud customers, officials say



Vivian Cheng allegedly stole more than \$45,000 from members of the Chinese and Chinese-speaking communities via her Chinatown travel agency, officials said. Credit: for New York Daily News / Alec Tabak

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A controversial Chinatown travel agent faces charges she stole tens of thousands of dollars and defrauded customers from her business on Pell Street, officials said.

On Monday, NYPD detectives arrested Vivian Cheng, 46, of Queens, and charged her with multiple counts of grand larceny and running a scheme to defraud, officials said.

Cheng operated Broadway Tours out of a tiny Chinatown office until the travel agency filed for bankruptcy in May and closed. Soon afterward, hundreds of clients claimed they lost up to \$1 million, with some travelers stranded in China.

The indictment by a Manhattan grand jury alleges that from early 2014 until May 2015, Cheng, through her business, also known as First Chamber Inc., stole more than \$45,000 and cheated travel agency customers attempting to fly on return tickets to the Far East, said Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. in a statement.

At her arraignment late Monday in Manhattan State Supreme Court, Cheng pleaded not guilty and was ordered held by Judge Daniel P. Fitzgerald on \$250,000 bail.

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Defense attorney Edmond Wong said Tuesday Cheng's family was trying to collect money for bail and "she is maintaining her innocence."

Cheng's business problems came to light in May when Newsday and Chinese-language newspapers reported hundreds of customers alleged they paid for round-trip airline tickets but never received them after her travel agency closed its doors.

Edward Chiu, who referred clients to the NYPD as a senior adviser to the Lin Sing Association -- a Chinatown-based nonprofit advocacy group -- said some 600 customers were victimized in the scheme.

In his statement, Vance put the number at closer to 100 victims but added that representatives from his office plan to meet with others who believe they were cheated.

Vance also alleged that Cheng charged more than \$60,000 in airline tickets to a credit card without the cardholder's permission.

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During a July federal bankruptcy court hearing, Cheng and her brother, Wilson Cheng, who isn't charged in the latest case, admitted in sworn testimony that First Chamber ran into cash flow problems.

The Chengs indicated under questioning by bankruptcy trustee Albert Togut that they took money from the newest customers to pay for the airline tickets of earlier customers, as well as to cover expenses.



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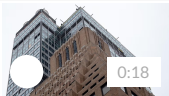
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