

Rising Star: Mayer Brown's Jing Zhang

By Alyssa Aquino

Law360 (June 25, 2021, 3:02 PM EDT) -- Mayer Brown LLP's Jing Zhang secured low tariffs for Turkey's largest aluminum sheet producer and nabbed several country-of-origin victories for Chinese companies facing Section 301 duties, winning her a spot among international trade attorneys under age 40 honored by Law360 as Rising Stars.

HER PROUDEST MOMENT AS AN ATTORNEY:

In 2020, the U.S. Department of Commerce began what Secretary Wilbur Ross called its "broadest trade enforcement action in two decades," an investigation into aluminum sheets imported from 18 countries, including Turkey. Mayer Brown represented Turkey's largest aluminum sheet and foil producer, Assan Alüminyum Sanayi ve Ticaret AS.

Zhang was the managing partner for the case and helped secure Assan a significant victory: a first-of-its-kind ruling from Commerce that because Turkey maintains a "normal" value-added tax system, VAT exemptions in Turkey don't amount to a countervailable subsidy. The team had won on several issues, resulting in low countervailing tariffs of 2.56%.

But the fact that they won on the VAT issue was significant for Zhang. She had dedicated a lot of time to understanding the topic as a third-year associate for a 2013 case and had penned a legal brief on the issue that her bosses thought highly of, Zhang said. It was also in managing the Assan case that Zhang could appreciate how much she'd grown as an attorney between 2013 and 2020.

"I was very proud of the things I've learned and improved on over those years," Zhang said.

A CHALLENGING CASE SHE WORKED ON:

In 2016, Mayer Brown took on the case of an Indonesian paper company that the U.S. Department of Commerce was investigating for alleged subsidies. The client — which Zhang declined to name — was



Jing Zhang
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Age: 35
 Home base: Washington
 Position: Partner
 Law school: Maurer School of Law, Indiana University
 First job after law school: Associate at Mayer Brown

the second-largest uncoated-paper company in Indonesia and genuinely believed that it didn't benefit from subsidies, but previous investigations into two other, similar businesses resulted in high countervailing tariffs, according to Zhang.

As the case played out, Zhang wound up playing an important role in decision-making. By the end of the three-year affair, many of the strategies Zhang suggested helped to lower the company's countervailing duty rate from over 40% to just 5%, she said.

OTHER CASES SHE HAS WORKED ON:

Throughout the past year, Zhang notched several victories for companies facing Section 301 duties on Chinese imports. She secured five favorable country-of-origin rulings for Chinese supplements maker Sirio Nutrition Co. Ltd. and helped a consumer electronics company — which she declined to name — develop production plans that conferred non-Chinese origin for two of its key products, allowing it to avoid Section 301 duties on its products.

Zhang also recently represented a Chinese energy company selected for a risk assessment with U.S. Customs and Border Protection. CBP's audits are routine affairs intended to identify risks with businesses' importing practices. However, the assessment was particularly challenging for her client — there are several U.S. tariffs covering foreign energy products, and though the company is based in China, it manufactures its products abroad, Zhang said.

"There was a lot of issues for CBP to examine," she said.

After one sit-down meeting and a supplemental briefing, CBP determined that there were no red flags with the company's importing practices. In contrast, the company's rivals had to go through at least two face-to-face meetings.

"They are very proud of that fact, because reputationally, it meant a lot for them," Zhang said.

WHAT MOTIVATES HER:

Zhang is driven by the high trust her clients place in her. She knows full well that a poor showing from her would affect her client's workers and supply chains.

"As a lawyer, I owe them my full heart and maximum amount of effort to get them the results," Zhang said. "My philosophy is simple: It's important to my clients, it's of paramount importance to me."

HOW SHE THINKS HER PRACTICE OR THE LEGAL INDUSTRY WILL CHANGE IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS:

Over the next few years, Zhang expects trade attorneys to deal with emerging issues and quickly develop legal strategies to serve their clients. She pointed out that several of her colleagues have already developed a practice in one of the more prominent emerging issues: forced labor.

Zhang also sees a technology surge taking place. Though Zhang likes the convenience of meeting face to face to go through all the factual records involved in international trade deals, she's grown to appreciate the ease of communicating through video conference apps.

"I think the industry, over the next few years, will have found a new balance between meeting in person and having those sorts of face-to-face communications" over web applications, she said.

— *As told to Alyssa Aquino*

Law360's Rising Stars are attorneys under 40 whose legal accomplishments belie their age. A team of Law360 editors selected the 2021 Rising Stars winners after reviewing more than 1,400 submissions. Attorneys had to be under 40 as of April 30, 2021, to be eligible for this year's award. This interview has been edited and condensed.

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