

PITTSBURGH BUSINESS TIMES

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

Yuanyou “Sunny” Yang, Porter Wright Morris & Arthur LLP



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Yuanyou Yang, who has worked as a lawyer for 12 years, joined Columbus-based Porter Wright’s almost four-year-old downtown Pittsburgh office in early 2020. She is admitted to practice in the U.S. and the People’s Republic of China. She focuses on international business matters and trade, and she represents Chinese entities doing business in the U.S. and U.S. firms pursuing investments or operating in China.

What’s one thing that has come out of the pandemic that you hope will stick? Flexibility. I think many companies suddenly realized that it is actually okay to provide employees with more flexibility than they traditionally have provided, and possibly they do not have to rigidly mandate 9 to 5, and things will still get done. I understand that many companies are discussing the return to work plan post-pandemic, but I hope the flexibility will continue.

How has your specific practice area been impacted by the events of the past year? As a general matter, the international business and trade prac-

tice has been impacted heavily by a series of events last year: the pandemic, the travel restrictions, the supply chain disruptions and the strained, but ever-changing, international relationship between the U.S. and other countries, particularly with China. New rules and regulations came out frequently, sometimes even on a daily basis, which has imposed significant challenges for our clients trying to do business in the international context. Attorneys in my practice area were very busy helping our clients navigate those challenges, making sure our clients understood how those changes would impact their respective businesses, building up compliance programs and helping our clients to formulate a strategy to move forward from the legal perspective.

What is your most memorable case or major legal project? Probably the case where I represented a Chinese purchaser who was defrauded by a so-called U.S. auto dealer. The dealer had promised the purchaser a number of luxury cars. The cars did not exist – the whole thing was a Ponzi scheme, and many people, including my client, were defrauded. I was able to get the full money back for the client, but I remember the case so vividly because it was the first time I interacted directly with the FBI!

What can the legal industry do to improve diversity and attract more diverse candidates? The reasons are complicated and often debated, and it is really hard to provide a simple answer to the question. The key point I want to say is that the leadership needs to truly understand and appreciate the value of diversity and inclusion – it is not just symbolism but ways to leverage unseen strengths. For law firms and companies, they can benefit enormously from the cultural capital those minority professionals routinely develop outside of work. The culture can get better with such awareness and commitment.

What is your favorite depiction of a lawyer in a book, TV or cinema? Alicia Florrick from “The Good Wife.”

How has the pandemic impacted your practice representing U.S. companies investing/operating in China and vice-versa? It is probably the strained U.S.–China relationship during the pandemic, rather than the pandemic itself, that caused a larger impact on international business and trade practice. The legal landscape changed significantly with the geopolitical tensions, and it is so much more complicated to conduct international business these days. Companies will have to continue to navigate through a series of regulatory issues that did not exist or apply traditionally, such as tariffs and trade remedies, interactions with the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, export control and sanctions, and now possibly import controls. Those rules are changing, too, and that imposes constant challenges. However, there are still tremendous opportunities on both sides, and companies just need to find ways to make things work.