

Title: Eric Wu a.k.a. Wu Chun and Daphny Chen versus People of the Philippines and Hafti Tours, Inc.

Facts:

Eric Wu (a.k.a. Wu Chun) and Daphny Chen, spouses and Taiwan nationals residing in the Philippines, were embroiled in legal battles with HAFTI Tours, Inc. (HTI), following their investment shift from the Philippine Retirement Authority (PRA) to HTI in 2002. The transition led to their authorization to handle HTI's corporate accounts, a privilege they allegedly misused, according to two Informations for Estafa under Article 315 1(b) of the Revised Penal Code lodged against them in Pasay City's Regional Trial Courts (RTCs), Branches 112 and 114, under Criminal Case Nos. 06-1263-CFM and 07-0254-CFM, respectively.

Before these cases, HTI lodged seven criminal complaints against the spouses Wu in Parañaque City, all dismissed for duplicity of charges. Despite this, two new allegations arose, leading to the aforementioned criminal cases. Both RTC branches initially quashed the Informations, prompting HTI to appeal to the Court of Appeals (CA), which reversed the RTC decisions and ordered the cases remanded for trial. This development led Wu and Chen to seek review from the Supreme Court, arguing the insufficiency of the Informations and alleging procedural discrepancies.

Issues:

1. Was there duplicity of offenses charged, considering the overlap of allegations in separate Informations?
2. Does the absence of probable cause justify the quashing of the Informations?
3. Was the principle of double jeopardy violated due to prior dismissals?
4. Did the facts alleged in the Informations constitute the offense of Estafa?

Court's Decision:

The Supreme Court denied Wu and Chen's petition, affirming the CA's decision to reverse the RTC's orders and remand the cases for trial. The Court clarified that the absence of probable cause is not a ground for quashing an Information at the stage of proceedings in RTC Branches 112 and 114, noting the difference between duplicity of offenses and double jeopardy. Furthermore, the Court held that the facts charged did indeed constitute the offense of Estafa under Article 315, paragraph 1(b) of the RPC, with specific emphasis on the elements of misappropriation and conversion.

Doctrine:

1. The absence of probable cause is not a ground for a motion to quash Information at the trial court level.
2. Duplicity of offenses charged in separate Informations does not constitute double jeopardy.
3. The determination of the character of the crime charged is based on the recital of ultimate facts and circumstances in the complaint or Information, not on its caption or preamble.

Class Notes:

- Elements of Estafa under Article 315 1(b) of the RPC include: 1) receiving money, goods, or other personal property in trust or under an obligation involving the duty to deliver or return the same; 2) misappropriating or converting such money or property; 3) such misappropriation or conversion to the prejudice of another; and 4) demand made by the offended party on the offender.
- Double jeopardy does not apply to cases where the accused was not previously put to trial or where there is no duplicity of charges within the same Information.
- Judicial determination of probable cause for the issuance of a warrant of arrest should not be conflated with a prosecutor's executive determination of probable cause during preliminary investigation.

Historical Background:

This case exemplifies the nuances of investment transactions between foreign nationals and Filipino companies, highlighting the complex interface between corporate privileges and criminal accountability in the Philippines. It reflects the challenges in clarifying the bounds of lawful investment activities and the protections against fraudulent misuse of corporate funds.