

Daily Journal

Record Child-Stealing Verdict: \$12.5 Million

Associated Press

A man whose French-born ex-wife abducted their child to her native country five years ago was awarded nearly \$12.5 million in damages on Tuesday.

Shing Loong "David" Wang, 40, was awarded \$9.8 million in general damages, \$2.5 million in punitive damages and \$124,000 in special damages because of his deteriorating health and legal costs stemming from cases in both United States and French courts.

"I'm very happy because it will bring attention, not only to the public, but to government agencies that might help in this battle against the French government to get my daughter back," Wang said in a telephone interview.

Wang's attorney, J. Michael Kelly, called the award against Sylvaine Marie Collet Wang the "largest verdict of child stealing in the country" and said it's the first time a California judge has quantified the loss of a child.

Retired Los Angeles Superior Court Judge Vincent S. Dalsimer, sitting on assignment, placed a \$1 million-a-year value on each year that Wang missed with Alice Stephanie, now 13.

He came up with the \$9.8 million in general damages, assuming that Wang wouldn't get a chance to see his daughter until she's 18, a total of 9.8 years.

"The court realizes that money cannot take the place of human bonding and affection but being charged with the responsibility of attempting to value those relationships fixes their value at \$1 million per year," he said in a written ruling.

Dalsimer also chastised Mrs. Wang and the French courts, which gave the mother sole custody of the child.

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By not allowing Wang to have any contact with his child, "the defendant acted with willful intent to inflict grievous mental suffering upon plaintiff."

Wang, a Taiwan native who lives in Los Angeles, filed the suit against his former wife on April 21, 1989, after she fled with their daughter to France.

Mrs. Wang, 41, couldn't be reached for

comment. She was not listed in the Paris phone directory, where she is believed to be living.

The couple was married in France in 1976. They later immigrated to Los Angeles, where their daughter was born in 1980.

The couple divorced in 1987 and both parents were awarded joint legal custody, although the girl was to live with her mother.

One of the stipulations of the divorce was that the child not be removed from

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**Judge Vincent S. Dalsimer,
Los Angeles Superior Court**

California by either parent for more than two weeks without consent of the other, Dalsimer noted in his ruling.

However, Mrs. Wang took their daughter to France in November 1988.

"I had no idea at all," Wang said of the abduction. He said he went to her home in suburban Torrance on his visitation day and found a note saying she was going away for a while. But Wang didn't hear anything, and later found that everything was gone from the house.

After fleeing, Mrs. Wang petitioned the French courts in Paris and was awarded sole custody of the girl. Kelly said the French courts cited the danger of Los Angeles' "polluted environment" as a reason for keeping her in France.

Dalsimer called the ruling by the French court "outrageous," because it showed "utter disregard of prior subsisting orders" by the California courts.

Wang, a restaurateur who owns Maison Wang in Westchester, has since remarried and has two young sons.