

Chinatown Brothel

April 9, 2010 Chinatown brothel probe leads to felony charges Accused leader of prostitution ring paid thousands to undercover officer, police say

By Matthew Walberg, Tribune reporter

The day after Chicago police busted his alleged Chinatown brothel, Sheng Quan Dong called the undercover officer who posed as a john and asked to have dinner with him, authorities say.

The call launched a lengthy undercover investigation in which Dong regularly paid \$1,000 a month to the officer to protect his prostitution business from law enforcement, according to charges released Friday. Dong's trust in the Mandarin-speaking officer was misplaced; he was only posing as a crooked cop as their meetings were audio- and video-recorded.

Dong allegedly paid the officer a combined \$17,300 in cash over more than a year, Chicago police and the Cook County state's attorney's office said in announcing multiple felony charges against Dong, his wife, a doorman, two suspected prostitutes and a suspected customer.

"This was not your typical prostitution ring," Cook County State's Attorney Anita Alvarez said. "Asian women from around the nation were being flown into Chicago to work as prostitutes for weeks at a time."

As part of the undercover operation, police even staged a raid in 2006 to convince Dong that the officer was indeed dirty. The undercover officer arrived in the midst of the raid on Dong's brothel and pretended to persuade the other officers to leave without making any arrests. Later, in a recorded telephone call, the undercover officer told Dong he had been in court on the day of the raid and didn't know that his team had targeted the brothel.

Prosecutors alleged that Dong unwittingly laid out the details of his business to the officer. He often had only a few prostitutes working for him for a few weeks at a time but used contacts with brothel operators around the country to bring in women of Malaysian, Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese, Thai or other Asian descent, authorities said.

During the investigation, authorities learned that johns had flown to Chicago to buy fake driver's licenses and other identification in Chinatown. That led to a spinoff federal investigation that led to charges last year against 19 people.

Attorney Jonathan Lustig said Dong and his wife have been living in the U.S. under asylum for more than a decade. They work at a cosmetics store owned by the wife on Cermak Avenue in Chicago, he said.