

National Victoria [Crime](#)

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Heavy-handed Crown security blamed for collapse of 'unlosable' case

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A three-year court case against a former baccarat dealer and an alleged accomplice charged with stealing more than \$400,000 from Crown Resorts has spectacularly collapsed due to security staff making threats and conducting hours of interrogations that forced admissions from the pair.

Former Crown Casino croupier, Michael Hou, 37, and co-accused Yixuan Cui, 24, both made confessions in May 2017, and police raids of a Southbank apartment uncovered more than \$200,000 in cash and casino chips worth about \$50,000.



Crown staff didn't play their cards right. MARCO DEL GRANDE

However, the Office of Public Prosecutions was forced to seek a discontinuance of the trial on Friday, after the County Court and the Supreme Court of Appeals found that heavy-handed conduct by Crown's security and surveillance unit had tainted the admissions.

The abandoned case has wasted hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars and raises serious probity concerns about Crown's investigators, who interrogated Mr Hou for more than three hours, while Ms Cui was detained for more than two hours, before they were handed over to police.

Defence lawyers for Mr Hou and Ms Cui will now seek to have more than \$250,000 – seized under asset confiscation laws – returned to the pair because of the bungling by Crown's security staff.

The court found that during questioning by Crown staff on May 1, 2017, Mr Hou was threatened with a long prison sentence if he refused to confess, while Ms Cui was warned that her parents and her partner's parents would face serious consequences back in China.



The case against former Crown croupier Michael Hou has collapsed. JOE ARMAO

Crown's investigators, all former members of Victoria Police, were also found to have claimed they could influence the outcome of a police investigation if Mr Hou and Ms Cui agreed to co-operate with police.

Mr Hou was told by Crown surveillance member Manuel Lyberis: "We are just trying to help you, mate. It's like a get-out-of-jail card and you might only get one opportunity."

Crown's investigations manager, Jason McHutchison, warned Mr Hou he would "cop the full extent of the law" if he refused to answer questions honestly.

After telling Mr Hou he had been a detective with Victoria Police for 12 years, Mr McHutchison said he would ask the police to "treat him all right".



Crown security staff have been blamed for the collapse of the case. JOE ARMAO

"That's why we have dealings with the police. That's my job, to deal with police ... if we tell them ... to treat someone good, they'll treat them good," Mr McHutchison said, according to the judgment.

The general manager of security and surveillance at Crown casino, Craig Walsh, also a former police officer, was present during some of the interviews. He told Mr Hou he wanted to be able to tell police that he had co-operated, and advised him to consider his family.

Crown's internal investigators arrested Mr Hou and Ms Cui on the night of May 1, 2017, when they were taken to a holding room inside Crown's flagship casino in Southbank. One of the rooms was marked "Victoria Police Interview Room", according to court documents.

The court noted the pair were never cautioned or informed of their right to silence or legal representation by Crown's surveillance team.



Yixuan Cui outside court in 2018. JOE ARMAO

Ms Cui gave evidence that she was warned by Crown staff that she was in "big trouble" and that her parents in China would be notified. Her partner's parents worked for the Chinese government and would also face serious repercussions, she told the court.

The interview with Ms Cui was supposed to have been recorded by a digital device in the possession of Crown investigator Wayne Eales.

However, about one hour of the interview – including the entire period when the alleged threats were made by Crown officers – was never recorded, the court heard.

Mr Eales told the County Court he may have accidentally switched off the digital voice recorder, but could not recall switching it back on.

When Mr Hou and Ms Cui were finally handed over to detectives from Melbourne West station, they made full admissions, including how the scam worked and how the proceeds of the enterprise were divided.

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