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IPad Dispute in China Gets Murkier

By LORETTA CHAO

BEIJING—A company that said it speaks for a group of major state-controlled Chinese banks said Wednesday that the lenders own the Chinese rights to the iPad brand, the object of a continuing legal battle in China between Apple Inc. and a local technology company.

But bank officials couldn't be reached for comment to verify his statement, and it was unclear how his comments might affect the case. The comments further muddy the waters of the closely watched legal dispute, which has implications for Apple in the company's No. 2 market by sales behind the U.S.

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Huang Yiding, vice president of consulting firm Hejun Vanguard Group, said in a emailed statement to reporters on Wednesday that a group of lenders that includes arms of [Bank of China Ltd.](#) and China Development Bank Corp. seized control of assets including the "IPAD" trademark early in 2009 through a reorganization of [Proview International Holdings Ltd.](#), which is based in Hong Kong. That was months before Apple reached an agreement with an arm of Proview

International that the U.S. company argues included the transfer of the iPad trademark.

In previous public appearances, Proview identified Mr. Huang and Hejun as representatives of the banks. The banks so far haven't directly commented on the case.

Apple-Proview Row

March 2009: Banks say they seized Proview (Shenzhen) assets

December 2009: Apple signs deal with Proview (Taiwan) to buy IPAD trademarks

January 2010: Apple unveils the first iPad in the U.S.

September 2010: Apple launches iPad in China

February 2011: Apple sues Proview to claim the iPad name

November 2011: Shenzhen court rules against Apple

February 2012: High court in Guangdong province hears Apple appeal; decision pending

Source: WSJ research

An attorney for the mainland China arm of Proview International, Xie Xianghui, said he hadn't seen Mr. Huang's statement as of late Wednesday afternoon but added that Proview and the banks are "heading in the same direction" in their dispute with Apple.

An Apple spokeswoman on Wednesday reiterated the company's statement that it purchased the rights to the iPad trademark "in 10 different countries several years ago," including in China.

The statement came ahead of Apple's introduction of its latest version of the tablet computer on Wednesday.

Currently, Apple is battling in a high court in China's southern province of Guangdong with Proview Technology Shenzhen Co., the mainland China arm of Proview International. Proview Technology argues that its December 2009 agreement with Apple didn't include the China rights to the iPad trademark.

Mr. Huang said in an interview that the banks have been in negotiations with Apple separately over a transfer of the trademarks. "Apple clearly knows that Proview [Technology] has no legal rights to sell or transfer the trademarks," Mr. Huang said. "What they are doing is neglecting and challenging Chinese law."

Proview Technology's creditors—who are already involved with the case—are some of China's biggest lenders, with deep connections to Beijing's leaders. Bank of China Chairman Xiao Gang is a former deputy governor of China's central bank, while China Development Bank is a policy lender that often acts as Beijing's instrument of soft power, bankrolling major Chinese companies and projects abroad.

Other creditors include arms of [China Minsheng Bank Corp.](#), China Guangfa Bank Co., [Shanghai Pudong Development Bank Co.](#), [Bank of Communications Co.](#), Huaxia Bank Co. and Ping An Bank Co.

—Yang Jie contributed to this article.

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