



Former General Counsel to ZTE Publishes a Tell-All  
Memoir of the Largest Scandal to Hit the Tech Industry!

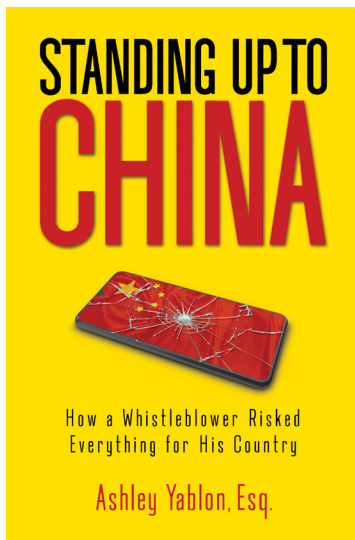
# STANDING UP TO CHINA

*How a Whistleblower Risked Everything for His Country*

By Ashley Yablon

“His story reads like a John Grisham novel.”

— Steve Kardell, Founder of Kardell Law Group and Whistleblower Law Attorney



DALLAS, TX—*Standing Up to China: How a Whistleblower Risked Everything for His Country* (Brown Books Publishing; On Sale: April 5, 2022) tells the thrilling true story of Ashley Yablon—a whistleblower who risked his life and career to expose his company’s illegal business dealings with Iran. In his debut nonfiction, Yablon recounts the national headline spiral that followed his affidavit leak, outing him as an informant to the F.B.I. Yablon’s memoir takes readers with him on a head-to-head legal battle against the world’s top Chinese telecoms giant.

As the freshly minted general counsel for ZTE, Yablon believed he’d landed his dream job. That was, until a confidential meeting in China where Yablon uncovered his company’s illegal scheme to sell billions of dollars’ worth of surveillance equipment to embargoed countries. If overlooked, the transactions could have led to critical security threats against the United States. Yablon’s choice to become an informant and expose illegal trade within his company led him down a course of personal and professional

peril that ended with ZTE pleading guilty. This resulted in the largest fine levied in U.S. history at the conclusion of the court case in March of 2017: \$1.2 billion in criminal and civil penalties.

*Standing Up to China* remains more relevant than ever today. As reported during the Defense Intelligence Agency’s annual threat assessment, China remains unquestionably “the primary danger to U.S. national security,” and ZTE continues to make headlines with new bribery and corruption allegations. Even 10 years after the whistle was blown, the domino effect of Yablon’s actions continues to assist in rooting out corruption within the Chinese tech behemoth.

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# PRAISE FOR *STANDING UP TO CHINA*

“Yablon’s story reads like a John Grisham novel.” —**Steve Kardell, Founder of Kardell Law Group and Whistleblower Law Attorney**

“What does a principled U.S. attorney do when working for a lawless Chinese firm like ZTE? He can either become an accomplice to the crimes being committed - and enjoy a lavish income and job security for helping it evade U.S. laws - or he can go to the FBI. Ashley Yablon chose the honorable course of action - honoring his profession and his country - and then had to flee for his life when his testimony was leaked from the thugs who were sent after him to end it. His story reads like an action thriller but is real life inside China’s major international corporations whose leaders believe, as one of Yablon’s bosses told him, that U.S. laws are only ‘suggestions.’ If you wonder why China, under the misrule of the Chinese Communist Party, will never become a responsible member of the existing world order, respect international law or abide by its agreements, read *Standing Up to China*.” —**Steven W. Mosher, China Expert, Author of *Bully of Asia: Why China’s Dream is the New Threat to World Order***

“Why do whistleblowers do it? Ashley Yablon’s experience illustrates why whistleblowers make the life crossroads choice to risk everything and ‘commit the truth.’ His story is also a microcosm of why whistleblowers are vital: they change the course of history by using freedom of speech to expose the dark side of corporate and governmental bureaucracies. This book is a must-read for anyone who doubts how one person can make a difference armed only with the truth.”—**Tom Devine, Legal Director of the Government Accountability Project, Ambassador of Whistleblowing for the State Department, and author of *The Corporate Whistleblower’s Survival Guide***



# ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**ASHLEY YABLON** is living proof that, sometimes, making the easiest decision is the hardest thing you'll ever do. Yablon was born and raised in Dallas, Texas. After graduating summa cum laude from SMU with a degree in political science, Yablon fell in love with the idea of becoming a lawyer while working as a runner at a local firm. He pursued his dream, going on to graduate from Loyola New Orleans. Upon graduation, Yablon began an ambitious career, swiftly moving up the ladder toward his ultimate goal of becoming general counsel to a major corporation. He believed his hard work had paid off in 2011, when he accepted a position as general counsel for the multi-billion-dollar Chinese tech behemoth ZTE at just 40 years old. Yablon's dream quickly became a nightmare when he found himself in the middle of the largest scandal to ever hit the tech industry. When faced with a dangerous choice between career and country, Yablon risked it all to stand up for what is right. His refusal to toe the line is an inspiration to all Americans. Yablon lives in Plano, Texas. He works as a consultant, advising law practitioners and corporations on domestic and international dealings, as well as optimizing their legal departments. He can be reached at <https://ashleyyablon.com/>, on Facebook @ashley.yablon, on Instagram @AshleyYablon, and on Twitter @AshleyYablon.



# Q&A WITH ASHLEY YABLON

**1. *Standing Up to China* includes accessible explanations of relevant laws and ordinances. In as condensed an answer as you can manage, could you please break down the illegal activity you uncovered while at ZTE?**

A month into the job, I realized that ZTE was under investigation by the House Intelligence Committee for potentially being a “threat to national security” because their cell phones had “backdoors” and other ways to gather personal information. In early 2012, the Department of Commerce was investigating ZTE for selling phone and spying equipment which contained U.S. component parts to Iran, a country banned from receiving U.S. goods. When the House Intelligence Committee accepted an invitation to visit ZTE’s Shenzhen headquarters in April 2012, I flew out to China to help prepare for the meeting. This is where I was shown a contract that included all the ZTE entities that would help Iran get the equipment, a 900-page packing slip naming all the shell companies of ZTE involved and a section header stating, “How we are going to get around U.S. Export Laws.” ZTE was intentionally breaking U.S. trade laws by purchasing U.S. component parts domestically in America and shipping them to Shenzhen, where they would be incorporated into ZTE products and then illegally be “re-exported” to the embargoed countries — in this instance, Iran.

**2. After writing of their experiences, fellow whistleblowers who expose corruption among China’s elite are once more put in the Chinese Communist Party’s crosshairs. Do you have any concerns you would once more be risking your personal and professional safety by publishing *Standing Up to China*?**

After going through what I did years ago, concerns are natural. However, not once did I hesitate while writing or going through with publishing my story, my truth. The risk will always be there. But the truth needed to be told.

**3. How is your professional life impacted to the present moment from what you endured working at ZTE?**

As you could imagine, I initially tried to steer clear of all conversations relating to ZTE. I reasoned no company would want to hire a G.C. who was recently on the front page of the *Smoking Gun*, receiving death threats and involved with the FBI. The inevitable part was accepting that this incident is now a part of my legacy and it would follow me for my lifetime, and I wouldn’t let it define or destroy me.

I am now working as an attorney providing outsourced general counsel services to companies. I take my expertise and serve as a consultant to help companies streamline their in-house legal departments. Whether I am on an interview for a new placement or on a meeting with clients discussing my relevant experience, the question always arises: “Can you tell us about this thing with you and ZTE?”



**4. Working in ZTE’s U.S. base allowed you ample opportunity to compare contrasting perspectives on U.S. law. Looking back, what red flag(s) shocked you the most about ZTE’s flagrant disregard of U.S. sanctions?**

Looking back, there were so many red flags that stuck out to me, but I was too blinded by my ambition to pay close attention to them. I will tell you, what shocked me the most was how brazen ZTE was throughout the investigation. From the “How we are going to get around U.S. Export Laws” header to their blatantly asking me to help them commit illegal acts against my own country, it was as though they never thought what they were doing was wrong and that U.S. laws were merely a nuisance that they needed to get around.

**5. *Standing Up to China* addresses the financial burdens, professional jeopardies, and interpersonal hardships that followed in the wake of the FBI affidavit leak. If there was a crash-course in what to expect after whistleblowing, what key lessons do you wish you’d been debriefed on beforehand?**

Standing up for what is right is not easy by any means. Whistleblowing is not for everyone, either. You may need to be the one who puts your hand down and finds another job. I don’t think there was anything I could’ve known beforehand that would have prepared me for the aftermath of the ZTE scandal. I can say, you will learn who your true friends are and the value of those relationships. Never take those friendships for granted. You will also learn to reinvent yourself and become more adaptable — this is for the good. Be willing to accept the fallout, and realize that the truth is a much better course forward than lying or not saying anything.

**6. The continuous endangerment of your physical and mental wellbeing at the hands of ZTE and China have undoubtedly left their mark. Could you share some of the lasting effects of your experiences on your health and mentality?**

I can’t begin to describe the toll it took on me financially, mentally and physically. I had a choice to let this destroy me or to build on it and make it into a positive. I chose, and still choose, the latter. This experience has made me realize what I’m truly made of. When push comes to shove, I will do the right thing. I’ve lost a great deal in terms of career and finances, but I have gained self-respect. I like and respect myself more than I once did, and to me that’s worth more than anything.

**7. In *Standing Up to China*, intense, never-ending gaslighting put you through the ringer. What advice do you have to share for those who are about to risk undergoing similar psychological warfare after blowing their own whistles?**

Following your moral compass isn’t always the easy route, as some would think. You have a ton of factors to consider. However, the cost of doing the wrong thing is sometimes higher in the long run. If I would’ve kept my head down and not made waves, there’s a very good chance I would be in federal prison right now. My advice would be to just realize from this that doing the right thing, while tougher, may cost much less in the long run.



**8. Perhaps drawing from your own experiences, can you share safe steps and procedures for those looking to expose corruption within their workplace while retaining anonymity?**

Start with consulting your compliance or H.R. department; they will be able to advise you on the proper steps. Also, being aware of your company's resources will be beneficial in situations that may arise. Many companies are now offering an anonymous "if you see something, say something" help line that allows employees to report unethical behavior without it being held against the reporter. As a last resort, and it may come to this, hire an attorney who will be able to help you navigate through the issue at hand. Bottom line, you need to report wrongdoing while always protecting yourself.

**9. Your lawyer notably stated your story "reads like a John Grisham novel." Now that you've lived experiences many people only see in theaters, has your taste in entertainment changed in any way?**

I wouldn't say my taste in entertainment has changed. I now realize that what you see and/or read is closer to home than any of us think. We've all had the "this would never happen to me" moment. I'm here to tell you it could, without you even realizing it.

**10. Knowing all that your choice between career and country entailed, how do you see *Standing Up to China* impacting conversations around China, the technology industry, and whistleblowing as a whole?**

I like to believe *Standing Up to China* will serve as a cautionary tale. China is the new 800-pound gorilla in the global business arena. Nearly every industry is affected by the country, and that will only intensify in the future. China is extending their reach all around the globe and is building infrastructure in dozens of countries, all leading to one destination: China. Inevitably, any person in business will at some point have direct dealing with Chinese companies, and we should be prepared. Dealing with China is culturally and politically different than dealing with the U.S. or other western countries.

I also like to believe that my story will change the negative connotation that "whistleblower" currently has. There are positives that can come out of standing up for what you believe is morally and ethically correct. When you risk everything, you stand to gain more than your losses. I hope my story encourages those to stand up for what is right — no matter what.



# METADATA & SYNOPSIS PAGE

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## SUMMARY:

What would you do if your ambitious career suddenly transformed into a deadly game of international espionage? A true-life thriller equal to that of a heart-stopping John Grisham novel, Ashley Yablon's story takes readers into the dark crevices of deceit and corporate greed of one of the world's most powerful Chinese telecom giants. As the freshly minted general counsel for telecom company ZTE, Yablon uncovers an illegal scheme selling billions of dollars' worth of surveillance equipment to embargoed countries. If left unchecked, these transactions could threaten the security of the United States at the highest levels. Instead of turning a blind eye, Yablon risks everything, including his life and career, to uphold justice — leading him down a course of personal and professional destruction. In this modern-day story of David and Goliath, Yablon goes head-to-head with some of the most dangerous and powerful Chinese crime bosses in the world. Ashley Yablon's life is a testament to the fact that what is easy is not always right, and what is right is almost never easy. The incalculable power that sets a hero apart is choosing to do what's right, even if — especially if — it costs everything.