

Canadian officials in Beijing turned blind eye to reports of immigration fraud, clerk says

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BEIJING -- Wang Xu, a young clerk at a Chinese government office, was working at his desk one day when his boss approached him with an odd assignment. He was ordered to report to a nearby medical clinic for an X-ray exam - even though he was perfectly healthy.

Puzzled by the order, he assumed it was some kind of routine check-up. But after he and a female colleague submitted to the chest X-rays, he soon discovered the real reason.

Mr. Wang says his boss admitted to him that the X-rays were for friends who had bribed doctors to provide fake documents for their Canadian immigration applications. He says his boss also told him that the fraudulent practice was widespread among Chinese citizens who want to conceal medical problems when they apply to emigrate to Canada.

The case appears to raise questions about corruption in Canada's immigration procedures in China, the biggest source of immigrants to Canada.

Mr. Wang was so outraged by what happened that he submitted a complaint to the Canadian embassy in Beijing in 2003.

He also obtained e-mails from two Chinese officials who confirmed the fraud.

He told the embassy that he was willing to meet Canadian officials and provide all of his evidence, including his own X-rays. But the embassy never asked to meet him or see his evidence. In an e-mail to Mr. Wang, the embassy said it could not do anything about the case because of "privacy" issues.

When he later discovered that his boss's friends had successfully emigrated to Canada, Mr. Wang approached The Globe and Mail with documents to support his complaint.

Mr. Wang, now a government employee in Beijing, said he was "very nervous" when he discovered that his own personal X-rays would be submitted to the Canadian embassy to support another person's emigration application. "To reassure me, my boss told me it was very common and many people do this," he said. "He was very calm about it, as if it was normal."

He said his boss told him that his friends needed the fake X-rays because they had marks from tuberculosis that would be exposed by a genuine X-ray, which could prevent them from emigrating to Canada.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada says it investigated the case and did not find any evidence to support the allegation. The department says it could not find an immigration file for the applicants mentioned by Mr. Wang.

But the documents provided by Mr. Wang suggest that his complaint was verified by two Chinese medical officials.

One of the e-mails was written by Ye Haiying, a medical officer at a clinic in Heilongjiang province in northern China, where the incident occurred. She was replying to e-mails and phone calls by Mr. Wang that had described the fraud.

"I have investigated and found out it was true," she wrote in the e-mail on May 6, 2003. "The relevant people in this issue were reported to the senior administration and will be seriously dealt with."

Her e-mail apologized for the problem and promised "further measures" to prevent such "switching" of medical documents by applicants.

In a phone interview, Dr. Ye confirmed that the e-mails were authentic, but declined to give any further details.

The second e-mail, written by a senior director at the Heilongjiang clinic on Aug. 14, 2003, repeated the confirmation and assurances of Dr. Ye's earlier e-mail.

After making repeated complaints to the Canadian embassy about the incident, Mr. Wang moved to Beijing for post-graduate university studies. He assumed that the embassy would take action in the case. But this year he says he discovered that his boss's friends - the wife and daughter of a well-known Chinese professor and businessman - had emigrated to Canada.

Mr. Wang says he could face retaliation from the professor and his former boss if his complaint is discovered, but he is still determined to expose the fraud. "I believe in honesty and fighting against wrongdoing," he said.

"I was used as a fool in a cheating operation. I feel that the Canadian embassy was trying to cover up the case and avoid an investigation. I'm very angry at the embassy's attitude."

He asked the embassy to return his X-rays to ensure that they could not be used for any further fraudulent purposes.

In an e-mail to Mr. Wang in December of 2003, the embassy said it could do nothing about the case, and it told him to go to the Chinese police instead.

"Due to the Canadian Privacy Act we cannot release information to persons who are not the applicant, or authorized by the applicant, on issues related to visa processing or medical evaluations," the embassy's immigration section told him in the e-mail. "Therefore we will be unable to communicate any further information to you on this issue."

Danielle Norris, a spokeswoman for Citizenship and Immigration Canada, said the department's Beijing office did a "thorough investigation" and could not find evidence to support Mr. Wang's allegation.

"We take every single case of possible fraud or misrepresentation seriously, and investigate each and every allegation to protect the integrity of our programs," she said.

She said Canadian medical officers give regular training to the Chinese clinics where X-rays are conducted for immigration purposes. "Medical officers also review immigration medical examinations, including chest X-rays, and investigate any discrepancies that are identified."

China has been the biggest source of immigrants to Canada in recent years. In 2005, for example, China was the source of more than 42,000 of the 262,000 immigrants who arrived in Canada, far more than the 33,000 who came from India. The number of applicants from China, however, has decreased in recent years, mostly because of the booming Chinese economy.

