



May 19, 2011  
Bakersfield, CA

## **2 charged in elaborate scheme to obtain valid California driver's licenses for illegal aliens**



BAKERSFIELD, Calif. - Two individuals will be arraigned in state court here Friday following their arrest in Los Angeles Wednesday on criminal charges stemming from their role in an elaborate scheme involving illegal aliens from Asia who traveled to Kern County and used altered Canadian passports and legitimate Social Security numbers to obtain valid California driver's licenses and state identification cards.

In addition to the criminal arrests, state and federal investigators executed search warrants Wednesday at residences in Norwalk and Diamond Bar, Calif., where the two suspects lived, and at business in downtown Los Angeles. During those searches, authorities seized a variety of evidence related to case, including computer equipment, counterfeit passports, lists containing names and Social Security numbers, and counterfeit driver's licenses from multiple states.

The arrests and searches are the latest development in an ongoing 17-month probe by Bakersfield-based investigators for the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), Investigations Division, and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI).

The investigation began in Jan. 2010 after an astute manager at DMV's office in Bakersfield noticed irregularities in a Canadian passport presented as proof of legal presence by an Asian woman seeking a California driver's license. Closer examination revealed that new biographic and signature pages had been inserted in the passport and the original photograph had been replaced.

According to the search warrant affidavits, the ensuing investigation by DMV and ICE HSI showed those involved in the scheme charged from \$3,500 to \$5,000 to obtain valid California driver's licenses for clients. Investigators estimate more than 200 foreign nationals from Korea and China, many who entered the U.S. legally but overstayed their visas, may have exploited the scheme. Subsequently, most of the aliens who obtained licenses or identification cards at Kern County DMV offices requested address changes at other DMV locations in Southern California shortly after submitting their original applications. Investigators say the suspects, who described themselves as "arrangers," recruited clients through advertisements in Korean newspapers and by word of mouth.

"With these arrests and continued enforcement actions, our message is clear: activities related to fraudulently obtaining a California driver's license simply will not be tolerated," said George Valverde, director of the California DMV. "I applaud the joint work by investigators from the DMV and ICE Homeland Security Investigations."

"Targeting schemes like this that enable individuals who aren't in this country lawfully to obtain legitimate U.S. identity documents is a top enforcement priority for ICE HSI," said Michael Toms, resident agent in charge for ICE HSI in Bakersfield. "Those who engage in this type of fraud are putting the security of our communities and even our country at risk. Schemes like this could potentially be exploited by dangerous criminals and others seeking to obscure their identities and mask their motives."

Ironically, the two men suspected of serving as "arrangers" in the scheme are both Korean nationals who are in the United States illegally after overstaying their original visas. They are charged with multiple felony counts, including manufacturing and distributing false documents; using a false document to conceal citizenship; perjury; forgery; conspiracy; and false personation. The suspects are:

- Dae Wahn Ahn, aka Caijuan Zhang, 49, of Diamond Bar, Calif.; and
- Chong Hwan Kim, aka Wang Xiao Jun, 47, of Norwalk, Calif.

In addition to Wednesday's criminal arrests, ICE HSI agents also detained four Korean nationals on administrative immigration violations who were encountered at the search locations.

DMV and ICE HSI received substantial assistance with the investigation from ICE HSI's attaché office in Vancouver, Canada; the Department of State's Criminal Investigative Division; and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Authorities emphasize the probe is ongoing and efforts are continuing to locate others who may have been complicit in the scheme. Prior to Wednesday's arrests, ICE HSI had already taken at least four foreign nationals into custody on administrative immigration violations who were identified through case leads.