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# Someone stole this immigrant's identity and unbeknownst to him, renounced his permanent residence

Immigration Department missed several red flags that would have raised suspicions about the fake renunciation.

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Sam Li is seen in what appears to be the photo that was later doctored by the impersonator. (The Star has blurred the photo at Li's request.) The AirPods would not normally be accepted in a passport photo.

Sam Li photo

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By **Nicholas Keung** Immigration Reporter

Sam Li came here from China on a study permit in 2016 and invested five years of his life in Canada to gain permanent residence.

It's a status that didn't come easily, and one he wouldn't want to give up.

That's why a letter he received last July left him shocked and confused.

A former landlord forwarded him a letter from the Immigration Department, notifying him that it had approved his request to "voluntarily" renounce his permanent resident status.

"As of the date of this letter you are no longer a permanent resident of Canada," said the one-page document, delivered by snail mail. "In order to enter or remain in Canada in the future, you are required to meet all the regular requirements as a

a study permit, as appropriate.”

The letter was authentic, but the problem is the 34-year-old Calgary man had never applied to give up his permanent status in the country.

The identity theft that Li fell victim to not only offers a cautionary tale about sharing personal information and photos but also raises questions about what the Immigration Department did to verify the renunciation application.

“It’s outrageous and astonishing,” said Jing Yang, one of four lawyers from whom Li sought help. “It’s extremely important for individual immigration officers to look at each file on their desk or on their screen, and do their due diligence. It’s not just a stack of files. It’s someone’s life, someone’s future.”

After initially studying in Toronto, Li has lived in Montreal, Winnipeg and Vancouver before settling down in Calgary. If it weren’t for the diligence of his landlord in Winnipeg in tracking him down, he said he wouldn’t even have found out his permanent residence had been voluntarily stripped.

After receiving the news, Li immediately contacted the Immigration Department, his local MP and a lawyer to demand the decision be reconsidered due to the alleged fraud. He also requested from officials a copy of his immigration file.

To his bewilderment, all the personal information in the renunciation application form — except for his name, date of birth and client ID number — was made up. And despite the requirement of two standard passport photos taken by a commercial photographer, the doctored image attached in the application had Li wearing AirPods.

“Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada still approved the application,” said Li, who has suspicions about someone he was in a dispute with but has no proof. “It’s shocking. It’s ridiculous.”

In his submissions to request reconsideration of the fraudulent renunciation application, Li’s first lawyer, David Chalk, listed the other errors and evidence of fraud in the form:

- Instead of including the applicant’s returned permanent resident card, the application claimed it was lost, but the card was actually in Li’s possession and not reported missing;
- The date provided for Li having become a permanent resident was wrong;
- The image of the biological page of his Chinese passport was from the one that he had reported missing rather than from his current passport;

application;

“The only possible conclusion seems to be that the application submitted was fraudulent and was submitted by a third party with malicious intent to harm Mr. Li by depriving him of his permanent resident status,” Chalk wrote.

While fighting to restore his status, which took four months, Li said he lost his provincial health-care coverage, was unable to work and suffered constant anxiety not knowing if he could stay in Canada and get his life back.

“It’s just so scary how easy someone could impersonate you just like that,” said Li, who spent about \$30,000 on legal fees and is considering changing his name to start afresh. He also learned not to easily share his personal information, ID and photos with others.

Although his permanent resident status was finally reinstated after an immigration investigator found the renunciation application was not submitted by him or an authorized representative, Li said he has lost faith in the system.

In a response to the Star, the Immigration Department said a person might renounce their permanent residence for a variety of reasons: to accept a diplomatic or official position with a foreign government; to obtain citizenship or permanent resident status in another country; if they fail the physical residency requirement and decide to become a visitor; and if they no longer want to live here permanently.

“Applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis,” said Immigration spokesperson Rémi Larivière. “Decisions are made by highly trained officers who carefully and systematically assess each application.

“Before revoking an individual’s permanent resident status, officers must adhere to the rules of procedural fairness and review any adverse information on file. Officers are required to follow procedural fairness practices throughout the decision-making process by providing individuals with an opportunity to provide a response.”

Larivière said the status was reinstated and there is no further investigation into the matter.

He said if someone believes they were impersonated and had their permanent status cancelled, they should request a reinstatement, which will be granted upon verification.

“We are not aware that this type of fraud is widespread.”



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