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Stowaway Has Canada and Hong Kong Scrambling



Canada Border Services Agency, via Associated Press

Images released by Canadian immigration authorities of a man who boarded a flight from Hong Kong to Vancouver in disguise last week.

By KEVIN DREW
Published: November 7, 2010

HONG KONG — A bizarre case of a young Asian man successfully boarding a plane disguised as an elderly Caucasian man has the governments in Hong Kong and in [Canada](#) scrambling to review their security procedures at airports and placed an airline under scrutiny for its passenger screening procedures.

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The story of the Asian man in his 20s who stowed away aboard a Hong Kong-to-Vancouver flight continues to play prominently in newspapers and TV news broadcasts as well. And

it has captivated a public puzzled over how screening staff at airports would fail to halt a person who wore a silicone mask disguised to be significantly older than his actual age of a different race.

“It is hard to tell by the photos, they are blurry, but the mask seems quite real,” said Gracy Hon, a Hong Kong makeup artist. Quick to point out that she is not an expert in special-effects makeup, Ms. Hon said it was conceivable with masks to deceive people who are rushed and not paying attention. “It did fool airline staff, after all,” she said.

On Sunday, a spokeswoman for the Hong Kong government said that the [Immigration](#) and Security authorities were still investigating how the young man managed to board an Air Canada jetliner on Oct. 29 in Hong Kong under disguise. No additional government statements would be made until the review was complete, she said.

What is known is that the man boarded the plane wearing the disguise and presenting a U.S. passport of a Caucasian man born in 1955. The aging face contrasted with the traveler’s “young-looking hands,” according to a Canadian Border Service bulletin issued over the case. Sometime during the flight the man removed his disguise, further alerting airplane staff who notified the Canadian authorities. Border officers met the man as he arrived in Vancouver.

The Hong Kong authorities over the weekend identified the man as coming from

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mainland China. The traveler has requested asylum, and an immigration hearing is expected this week in Canada to hear his appeal, possibly as early as Monday, according to Canadian news reports.

No link to terrorism has been suggested in the case.

In addition to the security review in Hong Kong, the Canadian government said it was reviewing its border security for international travelers, as well as Air Canada's screening procedures.

Security checks for international travelers at the Hong Kong airport, a major transit point between Asia and North America, are generally extensive.

Passengers are usually required to present their passports and boarding passes multiple times before boarding a plane — to guards before entering a departures hall, at metal-detection checkpoints and then to an immigration official. The final check of boarding passes and passport identification comes at the plane's boarding gate, staffed by airline personnel.

The security checks, however, may be reduced or even useless if a passenger first arrives at the airport with his own identification, and then, once in a secure area, puts on a disguise and uses different identification.

The Hong Kong authorities said over the weekend that the young Asian man was transiting through Hong Kong. If so, he may not have needed to go through immigration.

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