

ISU grad student accused of trying to sell military secrets to China

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June 13, 2014 -
1:49pm

A graduate student at Iowa State University is one of two people arrested on allegations they tried to sell military secrets to China, according to court documents unsealed late Friday.

Wentong Cai was arrested in Ames Jan. 22 as part of an investigation into alleged violations of the Arms Export Control Act, according to documents that first were reported Thursday by KOB-TV in Albuquerque, N.M.

It's not clear where Cai is being held. A business partner, Bo Cai, was arrested later and is being held in the Santa Fe County, N.M., jail, records show. It's not known if the men are related.

Wentong Cai and Bo Cai are suspected of trying to buy military sensors from an Albuquerque company and take them to China, according to documents obtained late Friday by the Ames Tribune.

According to the documents, federal agents seized a black Lenovo laptop computer and a Samsung Galaxy Note smartphone during the investigation.

Wentong Cai, a graduate student working on his PhD in veterinary microbiology and preventive medicine, was involved in efforts to try to buy the ARS-14 sensors as early as March 2012, records show, and had exchanged emails with the device's manufacturer in Albuquerque about his interest in obtaining the devices.

He indicated that he would be using the sensors in research at ISU, but when informed by the company that a purchase order on ISU letterhead would be required, he told the company he was thinking of getting a Chinese company involved.

The company notified federal officials and investigators with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security worked undercover during the investigation, which lasted for several weeks.

Wentong Cai and Bo Cai believed they were meeting with a man who would sell them the sensors, which are used for military communications and lasers in ground and aerial military vehicles, but also have civilian uses. Instead, the man they were meeting was an undercover agent.

Wentong Cai said in a series of emails to the undercover agent that he wanted to buy 20 of the sensors, valued at \$11,000 each, the documents show.

In one telephone conversation, Cai told the undercover agent he wanted to smuggle the sensors into China hidden in legitimate cargo, the documents said.

After a series of telephone and e-mail exchanges, Wentong Cai and Bo Cai met with the agent at their hotel in Albuquerque on Dec. 11, 2013.

Both men, who are reportedly in the their late 20s, had a Chinese technology company send the undercover agent \$27,000, according to the documents.

The undercover agent gave the men a nonfunctional sensor, which they accepted and carried with them as they boarded a plane from Albuquerque to Los Angeles. While the men tried to board a plane to China, U.S. customs officials found the sensor and confiscated it.

As part of the investigation, agents sought a search warrant from a judge seeking permission to search Wentong Cai's ISU email account.

Keith Bystrom, associate university counsel for ISU, said the university cooperated with investigators, but could not comment further.

"I know there's a federal investigation pending, and we were advised not to discuss the federal investigation," Bystrom said.

The documents in the case are dated Feb. 21 but remained under seal until late Friday, when they were released by the U.S. Attorney's Office in New Mexico.

ISU spokeswoman Annette Hacker confirmed that Wentong Cai had been continuously enrolled at the university since 2009, and was working on his PhD as of January, but he never completed the program.

Cai received bachelor's and master's degrees from Nanjing Agricultural University in China before enrolling at ISU.

Officials with the Iowa State University Department of Public Safety said they assisted federal authorities with the investigation but provided no further details.

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