

4 in 10 S'poreans married foreigners in 2012

If trend keeps up, policymakers may have to reconsider stand on dual citizenship: Analysts

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SINGAPORE — Married to an American who works in the US Army, Ms Rachel Tang, 30, a Singaporean civil servant, has considered giving up her Singapore citizenship for an American one to enjoy the opportunities open to its citizens.

Yet, she is reluctant to let go of what Singapore has to offer, such as “the good education system and higher economic growth” here compared to some parts of the United States.

Meanwhile, Mr Wier Thong, 29, a Singaporean sales associate, is married to Madam Jessie Li Jie, 30, from China, whose Chinese passport is an obstacle to them travelling because of the visa requirements. However, with ageing parents to care for back home, Mdm Li, who holds a Long-Term Visit Pass, does not want to give up her Chinese citizenship.

Ms Tang and Mr Thong are among the growing pool of Singaporeans who marry non-Singaporeans.

And as the Government looks at ways to strengthen its Singaporean core while growing its population, Ms Tang and Mr Thong hope that it will, for instance, reconsider its stand on dual citizenship so they need not be torn between two countries.

Last year, 9,000 marriages registered in Singapore — or about four in 10 — involved a Singaporean and a non-Singaporean. That figure has held steady for the past five years. In the White Paper on population released yesterday, the Government said that Singapore’s immigration policy “must also take into account” this growing proportion, including children born to Singaporean citizens overseas.

Analysts whom TODAY spoke to said that if this trend continues, it may prompt policymakers to reconsider dual citizenship, although they stressed that changing the law is not the only way to encourage this group to “sink in their roots”.

Sociologist and former Nominated Member of Parliament Paulin Straughan, a staunch advocate of dual citizenship, called for more measures such as courting and engaging children below 21 born overseas and who carry dual citizenship, to make them feel that Singapore is their home.

“Many of them have already been educated here ... allow them to sink in their roots, build their careers without fear that they have to give up their Singapore citizenship,” urged Associate Professor Straughan, adding that the ones who stay would “contribute meaningfully” to Singapore society.

In 2011, about 2,000 children were granted citizenship upon registration by their parents. Assoc Prof Straughan also suggested a “differentiated system” where only children with one Singaporean parent be allowed dual citizenship. But Member of Parliament Zaqy Mohamad

(Chua Chu Kang GRC) said dual citizenship could cause a “loss of identity”. People could also exploit the system, such as finding ways out of obligations like National Service, he pointed out.

Senior research fellow Leong Chan Hoong at the Institute of Policy Studies said dual citizenship is becoming increasingly common. Although the Government has never said “no” to the proposition, the understanding is that “the time is not right”, he noted.