

## **Child-care Plight after Flight Home**

**He marries Chinese wife without checking with authorities and also faces fraud charges**

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He did not know he had to check with the Manpower Ministry before marrying a Chinese national, a former Singapore work-permit holder.

He did not know he faced fraud charges until he returned from China.

Now he does not know who is going to care for his 10-month-old baby boy.

Life for Mr Y. C. Chen, 27, and his Chinese wife began to unravel when they returned to Singapore in July to seek a better life for their son.

His wife, Ms Li Qiaoyan, 22, applied for a long-term visit pass so she would not have to keep renewing her short-term visit pass.

When she first arrived in Singapore on July 3, she received a two-week extension. She extended her short-term visit pass two more times and received a one-month and a 1½ month extension.

After 10 weeks, when they did not hear from the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA), they decided to appeal to the authorities, with the help of their Member of Parliament.

His MP told him to report with necessary documents to the ICA on Sept 29. On the same day, ICA told him that Ms Li had contravened the work permit conditions. It was then that Ms Li discovered that she has been served with an entry ban to Singapore and had to return to China by Sept 30.

She left Singapore on Oct 13 after receiving a two-week extension on her visit pass.

As a former work permit holder, Ms Li has breached a Work Permit condition, which required her to seek permission before marrying a Singaporean. (See report on facing page.) Mr Chen said they did not know about the rule.

The former minimart assistant, who lives with his parents and two younger brothers in a four-room flat at Lorong Ah Soo, had to quit his job to take care of his son after his wife returned to China.

His predicament does not end there.

When he returned to Singapore, Mr Chen found out from the police that he would have to appear in court on Friday to face fraud charges.

As a result, his passport was impounded.

***SEEKING LEGAL AID***

He declined to reveal much about his court case, except that he is seeking legal aid and faces jail if found guilty.

He said: "If I could, I would have flown to China with my wife so that our family could be reunited.

"I'm just worried that if I end up being sentenced to jail, no one would be able to take care of my son."

Mr Chen's father, 64, is still working as a construction worker to support his brothers. His mother, 52, cannot take care of her grandson because of problems with her leg.

He said: "My wife was taking care of our son while I worked. I have no choice but to quit my job now that she has left."

The couple were married in China in July last year, after their son was born in March last year.

Mr Chen said: "We were not intending to get married yet, but we needed a marriage certificate to apply for Singapore citizenship for my son."

"Even when we were at the Singapore consulate in China, we were not told that we had to get permission to get married," he claimed.

Ms Li had worked in Singapore for six months in 2011 as a performing artist at a club at Lavender Street. She first met Mr Chen at the club, but he said they became a couple only after he went to Fujian, China, to meet his friends.

The New Paper met Mr Chen and his son at the void deck of his parents' flat last Wednesday.

They keep in contact with Ms Li via video-chat about three times a day.

Ms Li, who is at her family home in Fujian, told TNP over a video chat: "I'm just heartbroken to be separated from my family."

### ***ABOUT THE POLICY***

The Marriage Restriction Policy should be abolished to allow migrant workers to marry each other, as well as Singaporeans, said migrant workers group Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2).

In their recommendations for the Budget earlier this year, they wrote: "Part of acknowledging migrant workers as human beings is to accept that they are as deserving of love as any other person.

"Singaporeans have fallen in love with migrant workers and couples as well as families have been torn apart because of this law.

"Singapore cannot hope to encourage more marriages and a higher birth rate if we continue to regulate who can marry and who cannot."

Marriages between a Singaporean and a foreigner accounted for nearly 40 per cent of all citizen marriages last year.

According to the Ministry of Manpower's website, there are 980,800 work permit holders in Singapore.

National University of Singapore sociologist Tan Ern Ser thinks that although Singaporeans would sympathise with the couple, they would also support a stringent immigration policy.

He said: "My sense is that it has to do with ensuring that the people we are allowing to stay in Singapore on a long-term basis are those who are fairly well qualified, and that those in lower skill categories do not attempt to extend the period they may remain in Singapore through marrying a Singaporean."