

TRIAL OVER ANTI-ISLAMIC PAMPHLETS

Tracts 'no different from Da Vinci Code'

Defendant argues that works sent out had similar tone, content with widely available books

■ BY CAROLYN QUEK

A WOMAN on trial for distributing seditious evangelical tracts yesterday said she saw no difference between the materials she had distributed and other widely available books, including best-seller *The Da Vinci Code*.

UBS associate director Dorothy Chan Hien Leng, 45, said the fictional bestseller, which many think has anti-Christian themes, had been explicitly allowed by the Media Development Authority. The film of the book was also shown in cinemas.

Chan was fielding questions from Deputy Public Prosecutor Anandan Bala about a defence document she had prepared and submitted to the court. The document was titled *Objectionable Contents Compared*.

In it, she had made comparisons of extracts from some of the allegedly seditious tracts and the popular Dan Brown novel as well as three other books available



Chan argued that if a book was available here, it would not strike her that it could land someone in trouble.
ST PHOTO: WONG KWAI CHOW

here, to show that all of them had content or tone which could be deemed similar.

Chan and her husband Ong Kian Cheong, 50, are on trial for mailing two copies of *The Little Bride*, and one copy of *Who Is Allah*, to three Muslim civil servants between March and December 2007. The evangelical tracts were published by American company Chick Publications.

About 440 copies of 11 Chick

tracts were also seized from their Bukit Timah condominium apartment on Jan 30 last year.

In her defence document, Chan named three other publications which she said could be bought or borrowed here.

Linking extracts of *The Little Bride* with one of them, *God Is Not Great*, Chan said that both publications criticised Islam.

"It's not just the fact that the two publications have the same criticism of the religion, but anyone who reads these two books would not know that such criticisms are not allowed in Singapore," Chan said.

Chan had claimed on Monday that she had not read any of the 11 publications before she was arrested but conceded yesterday that she might have sent out *The Little Bride*, anyway, if she had read it.

Her point: The tract was available publicly in Singapore, at the time that she had bought it.

"If I go to a bookshop and see it, why would I think it's not allowed?" she said.

DPP Anandan asked whether it was a value judgment if such materials should be sent to members of other religions.

Chan agreed it was, but reiterated that if a book was available in Singapore, it would not strike her that it could land someone in trouble.

She also asked how someone like her could know what and what not to distribute. "Where are the OB (out-of-bounds) markers?" she said.

DPP Anandan pointed out that the prosecution had no problems with Chan wanting to spread the gospel. But it was the way you went about it "that we were concerned about", he said.

She agreed that there must be some restrictions in spreading the gospel in a multiracial society like Singapore.

"It was never my intention to stir up anything that would defeat the purpose of preaching the word of God," she said.

To this, DPP Anandan replied: "Mrs Ong, you may not have had the intention, but irresponsible evangelism can also cause hatred and dissension."

carolynq@sph.com.sg

About this case

MARRIED couple Ong Kian Cheong, 50, and Dorothy Chan Hien Leng, 45, each face two charges of distributing seditious publications and one each of distributing an objectionable publication and possessing seditious tracts.

Ong, a SingTel technical officer, and Chan, an associate director with UBS, allegedly committed the offences in 2007.

Two of the recipients, Mr Irwan Ariffin, 32, and Madam Farharti Ahmad, 36, received an evangelistic comic tract titled The Little Bride through the mail.

Another recipient, Mr Isa Raffee, 35, was sent Who Is Allah?

The couple, who attended Berean Christian Church at the time of the offences, are said to have distributed publications which have the tendency to promote feelings of ill will, hostility, enmity or hatred between Christians and Muslims in Singapore.

If convicted, they face a fine of up to \$5,000 and/or a jail sentence of up to three years on each charge of sedition. They also face a fine of up to \$5,000 and/or a jail term of up to one year for distributing objectionable publications.

For possession of such materials, they can be fined up to \$2,000 and/or jailed for up to 1½ years.