

LAWYER

# From loan officer to law firm partner, in 8 years

JUST eight years ago, Mr Lin Song, born in Putian county in Fujian province, lived a vastly different life.

He was a loans officer for a bank in the southern Chinese city of Xiamen in Fujian province, earning 5,000 yuan (\$1,120) monthly. He put his Xiamen University law degree to good use whenever he went to court to recover bad loans.

The son of a civil servant father and housewife mother rented a three-bedroom flat with two friends in Xiamen, and struggled to save up to 3,000 yuan a month as a bachelor.

Today, the 35-year-old is a Singaporean and a partner at Khattar Wong, a leading law firm here with more than 150 lawyers, and co-heads the group's 30-member-strong China practice.

He is married to a Singaporean lawyer Gillian Lee, whom he met at the firm which he joined in 2004. They have two children, Samuel, two, and Grace, who is three months old. Home is an old bungalow in Bukit Timah, and he drives a Lexus.

His turning point was applying for a master's in Business Administration scholarship from the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in 2000.

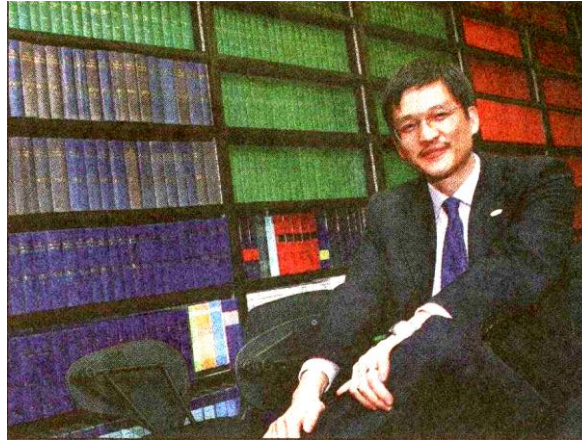
Although he was also accepted by the National University of Singapore and Indiana University in the United States, he chose NTU as it was the only MBA programme which came with a bond-free scholarship.

By 2001, he finished the course among the top 20 per cent of his class and landed a job as senior officer with statutory board IE Singapore.

When Khattar Wong wanted to expand its practice to China at a time of soaring bilateral trade, he was among its first China-trained lawyer recruits.

The firm now has the largest China practice here, comprising 10 China-trained lawyers. He estimates that there are another 20 or so lawyers from China, mostly in their 20s or 30s, now working for other firms here.

"We play a significant role in promoting busi-



Mr Lin is a partner at law firm Khattar Wong, which he joined in 2004. He co-heads the firm's 30-member-strong China practice.

PHOTO: MARK CHEONG FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

ness between China and Singapore, helping Singapore companies invest in China and Chinese corporations seeking listing on the stock exchange here," he says.

"Without us, Singapore firms doing business with China would need to engage the international law firms."

His greatest hurdle here getting into the corporate groove was mastering English, which he struggled with while doing his MBA course at NTU.

"Because English is my second language, I had to put in thrice the effort. It's been all hard work, no short cuts."

Still, he expects a continued and greater influx of Chinese lawyers as they may be able to practise here soon, when the rules are further relaxed.

"I will be the first to go for the local bar qualifications once we are allowed to do so," he says.

Looking back on the last eight years and the sea change in his life, Mr Lin, who became a Christian while studying at NTU, says: "I owe everything and all the opportunities given to me to my almighty God."