

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our Subscriber Agreement and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com.

<https://www.wsj.com/us-news/a-florida-surrogate-a-father-in-china-and-the-babies-caught-between-a3717a96>

U.S.

A Florida Surrogate, a Father in China, and the Babies Caught Between

Messy custody case lays bare risks that America’s largely unregulated surrogacy industry can pose to parents, surrogates and children



J

anty, Fla., sheriff’s office in a black SUV in June with two toddlers in the back seat. She had given birth to them and raised them.

ng to a video of the scene posted to social media.

them over to a lawyer for their father, who lives in China. He had paid more than \$300,000 to bring them into the world and had never met them.

Simpson told a deputy, before the father’s attorney buckled the crying boys, now 20 months old, into car seats.

d died at nine months old. In July, [Florida](#)’s attorney general intervened in litigation between Simpson and the father, persuading a state judge

he sprawling and largely unregulated multibillion-dollar American surrogacy industry, where it is increasingly common for wealthy overseas men to use surrogates in the U.S.

npson’s surrogacy—a high-risk pregnancy, an unexpected child, a sudden death, government red tape and an alleged fraudster with an ever-shifting legal landscape, according to interviews and court documents reviewed by The Wall Street Journal.

r: A new Florida law has placed the case at the front lines of conservative antagonism to birthright citizenship and Chinese influence.

has seemed at a loss amid sharply conflicting narratives. “This is a complicated thing that brought three children into the world and I—I don’t know what to do.”

!.

y to Simpson and her husband—who are genetically unrelated to the babies and who signed away parental rights when she agreed to be a surrogate in a Los Angeles suburb.

view. “It’s very traumatic and very barbaric how things have played out.”

n Zhou, wrote, “If you know the truth you will find Kyla has her plan to keep my boys from the very beginning. It is planned and premeditated w

TAP TO UNMUTE

ody of the twins.

e children. In late 2023, Angels Creation Reproductive Center—a fast-growing Southern California agency that matches parents in China and o

e man living in Suzhou, who offered her extra money to carry twins. At the time, Simpson was often working seven days a week as a bank teller

nts who couldn’t conceive and to fund a future—“four bedrooms, five baths,” she told the Journal—for her husband, daughter and herself.

in recent years to limit surrogate pregnancies to one embryo, citing higher risks of carrying twins or triplets.

\$50,000 for one embryo, plus \$10,000 for each additional embryo carried to term, and expenses.

Instead of twins, she was carrying triplets.

On Oct. 24 through C-section. Zhou told her he wanted to attend, but said he had hit setbacks trying to leave China. He asked her to continue caring for

over her surrogacy dispute.

He lives in the U.S. on and in court filings, except that he is Christian and close with his parents, whom he said were excited to become grandparents.

He has a relatively modest background, a contrast to the many wealthy Chinese elites who seek out U.S. surrogates. An international-school tutor and teacher, he paid for the costs of the surrogacy. In China, surrogacy is illegal, and single men cannot adopt.

He traveled to a marketplace to buy donor eggs and transport his sperm to the U.S., court records show. By 2023, the resulting embryos were at HRC Fertility in the U.S. and a U.S.-led Chinese firm.

His U.S. attorney, Lei Bai, to prepare his contract with Simpson. Bai would later be expelled from the surrogacy industry's ethics group for her role in a dispute over the children for them.

in a comment.

He said surrogates, who alleged the agency's poor screening of parents left her with \$180,000 in medical debt, the Journal previously reported. The agency's suggestion that ACRC's screening practices are inadequate."

He said he was fully paid, and ACRC urged Zhou not to rely on Simpson to care for the children, according to CEO Shen Li. "Any post-birth childcare arrangements were never recommended, authorized, nor facilitated by ACRC," Li wrote in an email.

He said he understood that, saying that ACRC recommended he work with Simpson because it would save him money.

re for the triplets. But as weeks passed and Zhou didn't show, she found herself with three premature infants she had not prepared for, no support

to court filings. He despaired about how to collect the boys, unsure he could obtain a U.S. visa, court documents showed.

for them and sent sporadic payments totaling close to \$10,000, plus reimbursement for breast milk, according to court records. He promised to support you often so we will be life long friends and you will be there godmother," he wrote, according to emails she filed in court.

the milk scarf isn't going to pay the rent that's due which the babies thrive under, or the car note which carries them to their many doctor appointments

at the hospital in January 2025, Zhou repeatedly asked her to get them passports, offering \$1,000. She never did. When he suggested she bring the three infants on a multiday flight.

the babies have been with you for a long time already," he wrote. "So I will ask my friend and agent to pick my babies, so that you can go back to your native country's home, she testified in court. She wasn't there. The men next went to her grandparents' home, which she said alarmed her. She said her mind was cluttered with other surrogates.

that wasn't right," she later testified. Simpson refused to hand over the children to Zhou's agents.

the use of nannies to collect surrogate-born children is increasingly common. Travel restrictions on Chinese nationals—first during the pandemic, then for nannies who care for children until their travel documents clear, then take them to China.

According to emails included in court filings.

of a Christian family," he wrote to Simpson. "What we do should glory the name of the Jesus Christ. But to hold back the babies is not righteous and God's going on," Simpson responded. "They are safe, they are stable, and they are WELL taken care of! You keep avoiding to apply for your visa. And

The reason he took so long to apply for a visa was that Simpson never obtained updated birth certificates for the babies listing him as the father. The birth certificates were updated to list Zhou as the father by March 2025. Simpson's attorneys said she worked with Zhou to obtain documents starting

lication in April 2025.

chair that the boys used outside the home of Simpson's grandfather in St. Augustine, Fla.

chair that the boys used outside the home of Simpson's grandfather in St. Augustine, Fla.

reathing in a playpen with his brothers. The medical examiner cited complications related to a respiratory virus and ruled the death as noncriminal. The family paid for the funeral, raising \$600 from donations.

ok all of the pain and sickness for you," she later wrote on Facebook. She gave the infant her last name in his obituary.

lies opened an investigation into the death. Excerpts later filed in court by Zhou's attorneys described dirty clothes and dirty diapers, and a car Simpson's as a high-risk household.

was closed without findings and that the children were "deemed as safe in the household of both parents." A Department of Children and Families, said that a "high risk" classification doesn't mean that the agency "verified findings of abuse or neglect."

as much as she loved her daughter. By spring 2026, she hadn't heard from Zhou in months, and ACRC was no longer engaging with her.

triplets died and is buried at a cemetery in St. Augustine.

triplets died and is buried at a cemetery in St. Augustine.

out the triplets' welfare, according to court documents.

months old, and Zhou had only seen them on video calls. His best efforts to get a visa to visit the U.S. had failed. Then he found a solution in the form of a letter from a doctor in Los Angeles.

Simpson's door in March 2025 and attempted, unsuccessfully, to retrieve the babies. He told Zhou that given a little more time, he could bring the babies back to the U.S. with him.

A panel of six judges needed to sign off. The passports were almost ready at the San Francisco consulate. A Florida congressman was personally involved. As time went on, Wan's claims grew more outlandish.

When the triplets had died, Wan initially claimed Simpson had fabricated the death for financial gain, according to court records, then said the surviving babies were still alive. He urged Zhou not to contact Simpson, saying it could disrupt his plans to get the babies. Zhou's attorneys would later allege that photos Wan sent to him showed the babies were dead. In a phone interview, he insisted that a reporter travel to interview him in person.

On top of the tens of thousands he had paid to Simpson, ACRC and other intermediaries—court records show. His children had been born 14 months ago. When the day passed without Zhou seeing them, he told Wan he had “no heart to celebrate.”

children that Zhou came to think that he had been the victim of a “fourteen-month fraud” by Wan, his attorneys wrote in court filings. Zhou re

lived in St. Augustine while they were in the care of Kyla Simpson.

lived in St. Augustine while they were in the care of Kyla Simpson.

to come crashing into the political furor over President Trump’s fight against birthright citizenship and right-wing anxieties over growing Chinese parents exploiting lax surrogacy rules, Republican Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed a law banning citizens of China and other “foreigners” from obtaining citizenship. DeSantis signed a similar nationwide ban in November, which hasn’t advanced.

years after Simpson and Zhou’s contract, and didn’t apply retroactively. But Florida Attorney General James Uthmeier nonetheless sought to invalidate the contract, arguing that it was void because Zhou hadn’t proved parentage under Florida law.

Simpson to place the children in the custody of Zhou’s attorneys, who took them to a doctor the following day. The examination found multiple injuries to the children, including bruising and abrasions. In an interview, Simpson said they were extremely allergic to mosquito bites, causing the abrasions. In a letter included in court filings, Simpson said the children were mistreated. In an interview, Simpson said they were extremely allergic to mosquito bites, causing the abrasions. In a letter included in court filings, Simpson said the children were mistreated.

to relinquish the children is false, Simpson’s attorneys said in an email, pointing to documents in the court record showing that Zhou asked Simpson to place the children in the custody of his attorneys. Simpson’s attorneys said in an email, pointing to documents in the court record showing that Zhou asked Simpson to place the children in the custody of his attorneys.

l without a lawyer. “I didn’t anticipate establishing a parent-child relationship,” she told the judge, “but what was I left to do?”

telling Simpson that until she makes a final decision on custody, the boys must stay with Zhou’s representatives. “There is no legal authority as n. Zhou’s attorneys removed the children to Monterey Park, Calif., a suburb of Los Angeles, and asked the court to keep the precise address cor
rom the U.S. Department of State: Passport applications were pending for both children. She had until July 20 to object.

whether Zhou can continue to keep the boys in California or must return them to Florida while the case is decided.

eir father has never met them. The woman who delivered them and raised them for 20 months hasn’t seen them for six weeks.

nvestigations team. She formerly reported for Business Insider, where she was a correspondent on the company’s national desk. She also reported on Amazon, with a focus on the company’s ex

alism School’s Stabile Center for Investigative Journalism.