

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, APPELLATE DIVISION,
SECOND JUDICIAL DEPARTMENT

Yi Jing Tan v. Liang

2018 NY Slip Op 02497 (App. Div. 2018) · No. 2016-01508 · Decided April 11, 2018

SUMMARY

The Appellate Division, Second Department, reversed a sua sponte dismissal of the plaintiffs' complaint under 22 NYCRR 202.27. The court held that dismissal was an improvident exercise of discretion because the Supreme Court had adjourned the inquest to a date when plaintiffs' counsel was unavailable, and remitted the matter for an inquest.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of the State of New York, Appellate Division, Second Judicial Department
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Reinaldo E. Rivera, J.P.; Jeffrey A. Cohen, J.; Joseph J. Maltese, J.; Angela G. Iannacci, J.
JURISDICTION	New York
DECIDED	April 11, 2018
DOCKET	2016-01508
DISPOSITION	reversed_and_remanded
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Plaintiffs appealed from an order that sua sponte directed dismissal of their complaint under 22 NYCRR 202.27 after the plaintiffs were not ready to proceed with a damages inquest. The Appellate Division deemed the appeal a motion for leave to appeal, granted leave, and reversed.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	Abuse of discretion; the court reviewed whether the Supreme Court improvidently exercised its discretion in dismissing the complaint for lack of readiness under 22 NYCRR 202.27(b).
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	Published New York Appellate Division opinion
PARTIES	Yi Jing Tan, et al. v. Gary Liang, et al.

TOPICS

- appellate procedure
- default
- civil procedure
- standard of review
- remedies

PRACTICE AREAS

civil procedure

appellate procedure

remedies

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether the plaintiffs' notice of appeal from a sua sponte dismissal order could be treated as an application for leave to appeal.
2. Whether the plaintiffs could obtain appellate review of their lack of readiness to proceed and whether that lack of readiness was excusable despite the order having been entered upon their purported default.
3. Whether the Supreme Court improvidently exercised its discretion by dismissing the complaint under 22 NYCRR 202.27(b) after adjourning the inquest to a date when plaintiffs' counsel was unavailable.

HOLDINGS

1. A sua sponte order is appealable when leave to appeal is granted; the court therefore deemed the notice of appeal an application for leave and granted leave.
2. Issues concerning the plaintiffs' lack of readiness to proceed and whether that lack of readiness was excusable were reviewable on appeal because those issues were the subject of contest below.
3. Although 22 NYCRR 202.27(b) gives a court discretion to dismiss a complaint when a plaintiff fails to appear or is not ready to proceed, the Supreme Court improvidently exercised that discretion by dismissing this complaint under the circumstances.

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

The plaintiffs obtained a default judgment in an action involving alleged breach of fiduciary duty and unjust enrichment, with an inquest on damages directed. The inquest was scheduled for November 18, 2015, but the Supreme Court adjourned it to November 19 over the plaintiffs' objection, despite knowing that plaintiffs' counsel was unavailable on the adjourned date. A per diem attorney appeared for the plaintiffs on November 19 but was unprepared to proceed, and the court dismissed the complaint sua sponte.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

The plaintiffs commenced an action alleging breach of fiduciary duty and unjust enrichment and seeking to void certain stock and real estate transfers. After the plaintiffs obtained a default judgment, the Supreme Court directed an inquest on damages. The court adjourned the inquest to a date when plaintiffs' counsel was unavailable, and, when a per diem attorney appeared unprepared, the court sua sponte dismissed the complaint. The Appellate Division reversed and remitted for an inquest.

DISPOSITION

reversed_and_remanded

REMAND INSTRUCTIONS

Remanded to the Supreme Court, Queens County, for an inquest on damages.

CASES CITED

- Matter of Andrew J.U.M. [Jelaine E.M.], 154 AD3d 758, 759
- James v Powell, 19 NY2d 249, 256 n 3
- Bank of N.Y. v Castillo, 120 AD3d 598, 599

OPINION

PER CURIAM.

Yi Jing Tan v Liang (2018 NY Slip Op 02497) Yi Jing Tan v Liang 2018 NY Slip Op 02497 Decided on April 11, 2018 Appellate Division, Second Department Published by New York State Law Reporting Bureau pursuant to Judiciary Law § 431. This opinion is uncorrected and subject to revision before publication in the Official Reports. Decided on April 11, 2018 SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK Appellate Division, Second Judicial Department REINALDO E. RIVERA, J.P.

JEFFREY A. COHEN JOSEPH J. MALTESE ANGELA G. IANNACCI, JJ. 2016-01508 (Index No. 702679/12) [*1]Yi Jing Tan, etc., et al., appellants, vGary Liang, et al., respondents. Yinghao Yang, New York, NY, for appellants. Wang Law Office, PLLC, Flushing, NY (Jean Wang of counsel), for respondents. DECISION & ORDER In an action, inter alia, to recover damages for breach of fiduciary duty and unjust enrichment, the plaintiffs appeal from an order of the Supreme Court, Queens County (Duane A. Hart, J.), dated December 7, 2015.

The order, insofar as appealed from, sua sponte, directed dismissal of the complaint pursuant to 22 NYCRR 202.27. ORDERED that on the Court's own motion, the notice of appeal from so much of the order as, sua sponte, directed dismissal of the complaint is deemed to be an application for leave to appeal from that portion of the order, and leave to appeal is granted (see CPLR 5701[c]); and it is further, ORDERED that the order is reversed insofar as appealed from, on the facts and in the exercise of discretion, and the matter is remitted to the Supreme Court, Queens County, for an inquest; and it is further, ORDERED that one bill of costs is awarded to the plaintiffs.

In 2012, the plaintiffs commenced this action, alleging, inter alia, breach of fiduciary duty and unjust enrichment, and seeking to void certain stock transfers and real estate transfers. The plaintiffs were awarded a default judgment, and an inquest on damages was directed.

The inquest was scheduled for November 18, 2015, and the parties appeared for the inquest on that day. The Supreme Court adjourned the matter to the next day, November 19, 2015, over the plaintiffs' objection and despite a request of the plaintiffs' counsel for an adjournment to a different day because she was unavailable on November 19.

On November 19, 2015, the plaintiffs were represented by a per diem attorney, who was unprepared to proceed with the inquest. The court, sua sponte, directed dismissal of the complaint pursuant to 22 NYCRR 202.27. The plaintiffs appeal. A sua sponte order is appealable if leave to appeal is granted (see CPLR 5701[c]).

Moreover, although the order appealed from was entered upon the plaintiffs' purported default, the issues of the plaintiffs' lack of readiness to proceed, and whether it was excusable, were "the subject of contest below" (Matter of Andrew J.U.M. [Jelaine E.M.], 154 AD3d 758, 759 [internal quotation marks omitted]; see *James v Powell*, 19 NY2d 249, 256 n 3) and, therefore, are subject to review on appeal.

Pursuant to 22 NYCRR 202.27(b), a court has the discretion to direct dismissal of a complaint where the plaintiff fails to appear or is not ready to proceed. Here, the Supreme Court based its decision to dismiss the complaint upon the plaintiffs' lack of readiness to proceed on November 19, 2015, a date to which the court adjourned the matter despite its awareness that the plaintiffs' counsel would not be available.

Under the circumstances presented, the court improvidently exercised its discretion in, sua sponte, directing dismissal of the complaint (see *Bank of N.Y. v Castillo*, 120 AD3d 598, 599). RIVERA, J.P., COHEN, MALTESE and IANNACCI, JJ., concur. ENTER: Aprilanne Agostino Clerk of the Court