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AAS/POL 307

Professor Christoff

May 9, 2018

Final Report

Section One:

Person interviewed: Eileen Lui

Interviewee's title or position: Founder of “Children of Tomorrow”, Coach/Mentor, Entrepreneur, Marketing Communications (MARCOMs) Consultant, Author, Certified Fitness Trainer, and a housewife.

Date, time, and length of interview: April 16, 2018; 9 PM Eastern Time (7:30 AM Myanmar Time); 1 hour, 3 minutes and 24 seconds.

Your objective in conducting this interview: Our main goal was to ask Eileen Lui about her childhood, her parents' careers, her mission and goals in life, and how she came to accomplish them. Overall, we wanted to get an idea of the steps she took to get to where she is now in her life.

Section Two:

Prior to the interview Katie and I prepared ourselves by collecting any information we could get on Eileen via social media, LinkedIn account, previous interviews in Myanmar media, and YouTube videos. We were fortunate to get a handful of information and data on Eileen Lui. Since she is very well known in Myanmar, it was not hard for us to conduct a background search. These were the sources we used to gather Eileen's information prior to the interview:

<http://www.asianentrepreneur.org/eileen-lui-soyai/>; <https://www.linkedin.com/in/eileen-lui-419448/>; <https://www.myanmar.com/yangon/author/eileenlui/>;
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HMhQaWE-q7o>;
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ByvrogCTMg>;
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_ZmB_uCGPY;
<https://www.facebook.com/cotyouthcentre/>;
<https://www.facebook.com/unwomenasia/photos/a.125861380908222.24093.124151414412552/755807207913633/?type=3&theater>.

After going through all these sources, we narrowed it down to what questions we still needed to ask and what questions we could follow up on. We didn't want to ask her the questions that were typically thrown at her in other interviews, so we decided to create interesting open-ended questions. We created 15 questions in total. Google docs. was our platform to share these questions and make necessary edits, if needed. The plan was to take turns asking each question. Due to the conflict in all our schedules, we had to come up with a day and time to conduct this interview. Time zone difference was another obstacle for us, since Eileen was 12 hours ahead of us. Eileen is also a very busy woman and for her to make time was difficult. In the end, Katie and I decided to go by Eileen's availability. Eileen said she's usually available early in the morning which is night time here. At first, we didn't know where to find a place for the interview. Finally, on the day of the interview, we tried to reserve a room in the library but they were all occupied and outside the library was too loud for us to conduct the interview. Eventually, we found an empty space on the second floor of the Student Activities Center. I arrived half an hour early before the interview to set up the laptop, and to make sure the camera

and recording application were all working properly to avoid any potential technical issues.

These were the questions we asked Ms. Lui:

Interview Questions:

Childhood

1. Where were you born and what were your parents' occupations?
2. What was your childhood like?
 1. What were some goals you had for yourself as a child? OR
 2. What was your dream career as a child? Why?

Career

3. I understand, you are an entrepreneur, an author, fitness trainer, a voice for the youth and at the same time you maintain a full-time career in Myanmar.
 1. How and why did you come about taking on these positions?
 2. Can you give us the details on how you manage to do all these?
 3. What do you want to achieve from doing all of this?
 4. What do you think are the impacts of your efforts?
4. In the Asian Entrepreneur interview, you answered and I quote: "I've been living like a gypsy across Indochina with the intention of saving the world." Would you please elaborate on what you mean by this? And how do you intend on "saving the world"?
5. Based on our background research, you're the founder of SoyAi. Can you tell us about the SoyAi and how it came into being?
6. What about the Youth Centre in Myanmar? What influenced you to establish this community?

7. I remember you once told me, how you started out with a big group of kids and only ended up with a small number. Was it because their families didn't support the program or other personal reasons?
8. Based on your previous interview with Myanmar Entrepreneur, you expressed a certain opinion about NGOs. Could you elaborate more on why you feel this way about NGOs?

Thinking back

9. What countries have you visited and done work in? Could you please elaborate on those experiences as well as any hardships you may have faced while traveling?
10. In all the countries that you've traveled, how are women different from each country? Example, gender equality, women's rights and other discriminations they may have faced.
11. As a female, did you ever face any racial/ethnic, or gender discrimination? If so, could you elaborate on one experience and how you dealt with the situation?
12. In your own perspective, what are your thoughts on women in Asia and women in the West when it comes to women's rights and how their culture plays a role?
13. Would you say, in today's world women are more able to liberate themselves and able to voice their rights? Or is there still a gender gap?
14. As a woman, you have done a lot to create change in your community. In our course, we learned of many situations where "women were agents of social change". How do you feel about this phrase and do you agree with it?
15. Finally, to end this interview, what is one thing you hope to see in society (in your lifetime or the future)?

SECTION THREE (10 points; 2 points each)

Answer these questions:

1. *Did you get complete answers to your questions? Explain*

For many of our questions, we got more than complete answers. When Eileen answered our questions, it was like she was telling us a story. Especially when we asked her about how she came to receive the many titles that she had (e.g., entrepreneur, an author). She would include a lot more information than what we were expecting. There were many times where she would think of something relevant to what we were previously talking about and bring it up in the conversation.

2. *Was your interview structured, unstructured, or mixed? Explain*

Our interview was mixed, but a majority of it was structured since we stuck to the questions that we had written down prior to the interview. We moved along the interview by asking one question after another. However, we skipped over some of our questions based on her responses, because sometimes Eileen would provide an extensive recollection of information for one question, but would be sufficient for the following two-three questions. We only asked additional questions when trying to clarify something that she had previously said.

3. *What probing questions did you use? Explain*

All the questions we had were based on the previous research we had done on Eileen. One of the probing questions we had was about her opinions on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) because in a previous interview, she had mentioned that she did not like to be addressed as an NGO. Thus, we decided to ask her to explain more on why she felt that way. Another probing question that we asked was about her experiences in the countries that she had lived in (i.e., Myanmar and Cambodia). Since she is a woman and has experiences being a foreigner in

another country, we were interested in whether or not she had experienced any discrimination and if she had experienced difficulty in her work space. In addition, we asked Eileen about topics that we had discussed in class in order to see if her perspective differed from our classmates' responses. For example, we asked her how she felt about argument on career vs. family for women, since the topic was discussed in class and we thought it would be interesting to see if this argument is also present in other countries beside America.

4. Explain your team approach. That is, who did what?

For the most part, we approached the project collaboratively by doing the tasks separately and then we would each add or edit what the other had done. For example, when we were creating the interview questions, Sandy first started the list of interview questions. I added my own questions from the research we had on her and rearranged the questions so that they would transition smoothly when we asked them to her. During the interview, we each switched off to ask Eileen the questions and we took turns to respond to what she said for our questions. For the powerpoint slides, we met together to put all the important parts that we wanted to mention in our slides and then we each did condense the information on a slide (Sandy did process and I did content). Everything was done over google docs so that we could each edit it on our own time.

5. Did the interviewee give you any documents or references to articles to read, or did she mention other people for you to talk to (or research)? Explain

Eileen did not give any additional resources to research. She did, however, mention about UNICEF in Myanmar.

SECTION FOUR (30 points)

Insert your interview notes/write up here. Remember to be accurate and concise. Consider what was said, any emerging trends your interviewee mentioned, different interpretations, and recommendations for follow up interviews.

The first two questions that were asked about Eileen's childhood. We first asked about where she was born and what her parents did for a living. She spoke about being born in Malaysia and how her parents were teachers. She further clarified what level of education they were working at and their specific positions at the school. We then asked her about her childhood dreams. She laughed while saying how she wanted to be a police woman so that she could catch all the bad guys. To follow up, we asked her what her parents wanted her to be and she said they wanted her to be an accountant or lawyer. In addition to her answer about her parents' goals for her, she joked about how much she disliked math.

Following these two questions, we asked her about her career. Based on our previous research, we knew that she was an entrepreneur, author, fitness trainer, and a voice for the youth. Thus, we asked about how she came about taking on those positions. For this question, she provided us a very long and detailed answer of many events that she had encountered to get where she was now. She was very enthusiastic when she was explaining everything and at certain points, she displayed her frustration with her experiences through changes in tone and eye movements. She talked about many of her achievements, as well as the many issues that occurred along the way and her attempts to resolving such issues. Moreover, she recounted many memories that have shaped her into who she is today.

Eileen started off by explaining why she was in Myanmar, which was because her husband had gotten transferred there in 2012. She talked about her search for something to do because she didn't want to be a housewife. She laughed and further added how it was impossible

to be a housewife because there was no electricity or water. Following this, she talked about her job at Citi Mart, and about how she wanted to do something more than just work. The first home Eileen found had 26 children and she recounted one instance she had with one of the children. She had asked a girl what she had had for lunch and Eileen exclaimed that they only had papaya salad, emphasizing how ridiculous the situation was. She then talked about how she was introduced to a monastery with 200 children, about her frustration with the adults there, and her disapproval of how everything was related to money. She spoke of one memory where she had donated a TV and started noticing that the moms were charging the children to use the TV, which Eileen had not expect would happen. She then talked about her solution to this problem, which was to create her own youth center. She expressed the difficulties she had with starting it up because of the money, but she then expressed her gratitude and excitement of how her friends and family had supported her through it all.

Following this, she talked about how she was done with simply donating her salary, because she didn't think it was sustainable. She brought up her company called Soyai, which was designated for the 18 year old boys that she was working with. She talked about her frustration with the monks and how they disapproved of her not giving the money and instead making the boys work for it themselves. She even experienced emotional blackmail since the monks would say that they had no money to send the children to her. She recounted her experience of pitching her story to the public about Soyai, about her goals for the company and the very essence of it all. When she talked about all the achievements Soyai had accomplished, especially with the boys themselves, she spoke with honor and was genuinely proud of all the company has gone through to become what it is today. Moreover, she recounts memories of the initial struggles of getting the company started and the many experiences she had with the boys.

After Mrs. Lui spoke about her career, we asked her further probing questions based on our research, like about her opinions on NGOs. She described her disapproval of NGOs, like UNICEF, for using donations for administrative things, like paintings in an office. She contrasted herself from these NGOs, since she was using 100% of the donations for the children, because it felt weird to not be giving it all back to the deserving recipients. She also mentioned an experience she had when she tried to bring up an issue to UNICEF, regarding the government obstructing the ability for boys to attend school. For an organization that receives so much money, she never heard back from them about her issue.

Once we heard everything about her opinions and history of her career, we asked for her opinions about topics that were talked about in class. Based on the way she recounted her memories, Eileen expressed herself as a very strong and independent woman, who was persistent in her determination to create change in her local community. With that said, we asked her if she had ever experienced discrimination (as both a female and foreigner) in the many countries she had visited in South Asia. Eileen then recounted her frustration as a foreigner and efforts to fight the system that was already present in the community. This is very similar to the experiences of the women we had read about in class. She also added how she was stereotyped as a woman since people expected her to be emotional and would judge her for her appearance. We then asked her about her opinions on the discussion between having a career and having a family. She used her own experiences to express that there shouldn't be an opportunity to choose, because people should just do what they need to do. If they think they should focus on their career right now, they should, instead of listening to what other people have to say. She further added that people must first change their mindset, and change the ideas that people are being brought up with. She believes that because women are raised a certain way, it is almost like they are

brainwashed and this consequently impacts how they would act in the future. In other words, women become stuck in these categories/boxes. Despite the strong impression she gave off, she also believes that women who are fighting the system are still a minority, and that there are still not a lot of women that are trying to end gender inequality. As a conclusion, Eileen didn't provide recommendations for a follow-up, but she did leave a final message. She believes that without changing the mindsets that people are raised with, there will be a very slow change in terms of gender equality.

Section Five:

Your Analysis:

We've gained a tremendous respect and admiration for her work. In today's world, it's hard to find people like Eileen. Creating her own safe haven for underprivileged children in Myanmar and reassuring them that there's hope in life is what makes Eileen unique from other individuals. Knowing the fact that she is not a member of any organizations such as the U.N or the NGOs and that she works alone with the help of her friends and families shows that this is her true passion. She's doing all of this out of kindness and her true desire to eradicate poverty. To us this is more meaningful than anything else. Judging from her responses, it is clear Eileen is not the type to give up easily once her mind is set on a goal. She has many potentials, dreams and hopes for the kids in her youth center. Throughout this interview, we don't believe there were any aspects that were not useful. Since we did not have sufficient time, we would have liked to know more in details of her other trips to Cambodia and Vietnam. Also, what other programs or ideas does she have in mind for the children in Myanmar? It would be interesting to know if she has plans to build her own organization and help all the other children in the Southeast Asia as well.

From our class presentations, the presentation on Dr. Ling Ling Ho was interesting to observe. She is currently the head researcher for University of Wisconsin. She witnessed the era of the Chinese civil war. Hearing the story from a first person is much more fascinating than reading it from the books. It's scary to know that back then the only way to stay alive and be safe was by joining the Chinese army. Children were on the streets and had no educational opportunities. It was risky and dangerous for her to be seen with her Western (British) boyfriend in public during the civil war because it was a period when China was anti-Western.

The other presentation we also liked was on Sarah-Ann Smith. She was an ex-foreign service officer for the U.S government at China and Taiwan. She was also a professor at the University of South Carolina. Her role as a diplomat developed a better understanding relationship between Taiwan and the U.S; help people understand each other. The most interesting thing to find out from this presentation was that Sarah-Ann was the fifth woman in the U.S Foreign Service.

Other groups did a fantastic job on their presentations as well. Overall, this course has given us a lot of knowledge about women and the movements and revolutions they've started or contributed to. Katie and I can agree that after completing this course we have a better understanding on how history has a big impact on today's society. It's all a big wave of movement. If the women we learned about in class didn't take the initiative, then we (women) would still be living in a male dominated world.