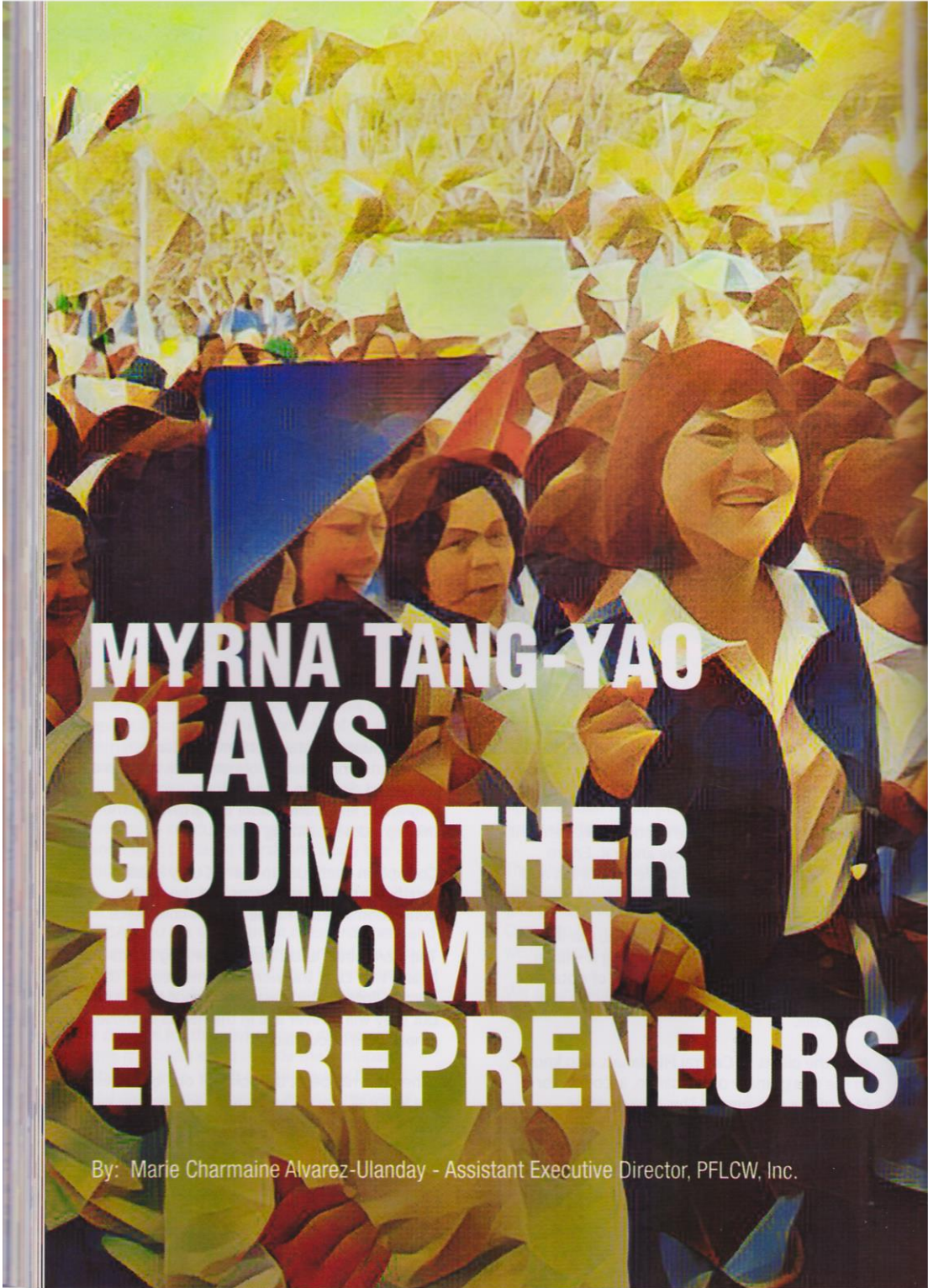


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MYRNA TANG-YAO PLAYS GODMOTHER TO WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

By: Marie Charmaine Alvarez-Ulanday - Assistant Executive Director, PFLCW, Inc.



Myrna Tang-Yao empowers women entrepreneurs—housewives with small, home-based business, socio-civic leaders and professionals.

There is no stopping her from pursuing what she has started more than two decades ago—promoting and inspiring female economic empowerment in local and global business arena.

The multi-awarded entrepreneur wears many hats. She is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of RichPrime Global, Inc. and Richwell Trading Corporation. She is the founder and chairperson of the Philippine Federation of Local Council of Women (PFLCW), Inc., The Federation of the Filipino Chinese Business and Professional Women of the Philippines (FILCHI), and Pearl S. Buck Philippines.

She also served as the Commissioner for four years and Chair for six years at the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW).

She is an inspiration to women entrepreneurs who start small, aim high, and make it big.

At an early age while living in one of the poorest provinces in Bicol, she witnessed the difficulty of women situation in the rural areas. This pushed her to work hard to be successful and help free others from the clutches of poverty.

As a grade school student, she sold accessories from Divisoria to her classmates. The third of seven children, Yao had to prove herself more than her other siblings, being a girl in the tradition of a Filipino-Chinese family.

In the process, Yao had to deal with men and learned to become as tough as them.

But this did not harden her heart on the plight of the less-fortunate. She had her first encounter with disadvantaged women when the family's female copra workers asked for wage advances just to make it from one day to the next.

That encounter left a profound impact on the future CEO who started Richwell Trading with a capital of only PHP5,000. Yao and her husband Albert have since expanded the business from selling tires to marketing and distributing children's products like toys, apparel, shoes and others.

It was Richwell that introduced brands like Barbie, Hotwheels, Mattel toys and games, Fisher Price, Megablocks, Disney, Ninja Turtles, V-Tech, Ollie, and others to the market.

Three decades after the Yaos put up Richwell, the company has grown to provide jobs for almost 2,000 people.

That is because Yao loves what she is doing. She has a soft spot for women and children. And it pains her when others look down on women, especially her fellow Filipinas.

Yao felt bad when she found out that Filipinas abroad are boxed into only two categories—maids and entertainers. So she decided to do her share in uplifting the Filipina's image.

Yao asked top designer Patis Tesoro, who is known for her Filipiniana-inspired creations, to come up with a Filipina Barbie that showcased the country's history, traditions, and customs.

The limited edition doll depicts the Filipino fashion and culture of different traditions in gowns whose beadwork and intricate embroidery became the toast of the international community. The dolls also wore colorful Igorot costumes, showed the beauty of Santacruzán, Filipino flowers and animal designs.

Soon, the Filipina Barbie was ranked as one of the best collector doll in the world.

She knows entrepreneurship can help alleviate the plight of needy women and children.

It is this passion for serving women and children that drive her to look for ways to improve their condition. One of the highlights of her stint as Chair of the Philippine Commission on Women, is the Magna Carta of Women (MCW) that seeks to eliminate violence against women, ensure equal earning opportunities for them, and guarantee their freedom from discrimination.

Yao took a step even further in her advocacy by putting up the Philippine Federation of Local Council of Women (PFLCW), the national coordinating body of all local councils of women (LCW). She believed that the government, non-government and private sectors should work together to reach her dream of economic empowerment for women.

The PFLCW is now on its 15th year and is the biggest organization for women. It continues to link the government, private sector, and women NGOs in the localities.





It is composed of about 500 local councils of women with more than 100,000 women members. It focuses on developing women entrepreneurs and removing all obstacles that keep them from being self-reliant and independent.

Yao knows ignorance is a big roadblock to progress. So she fights ignorance by sharing what she knows with fellow women entrepreneurs.

She put up Gender-Responsive Economic Actions for the Transformation of Women (GREAT Women) Project together with the Canadian International Development Agency. The five-year project (2006–2011) is a godsend for women micro-entrepreneurs, who are mentored on improving their organizational systems and sharpening their skills. This frees more and more women from the clutches of poverty, gives more meaning to their lives, and even allows them to become global players in the business arena.

Yao did not stop there. She came up with the book *"The Gift of a Dream: The GREAT Women Project"* to guide women on the rocky road of entrepreneurship. Yao shares her dream of becoming successful, not for herself, but for the needy. After all, you cannot give what you do not have.

So Yao decided to become empowered to empower others. Her business has gone global. And it continues to grow despite the many challenges it faces.

Now, Yao is in the best position to share her success story. Her book cites concrete steps on dealing with the changing times and sustaining a business. Yao shares her insights on doing business online, dealing with stakeholders, motivating project beneficiaries, and others.

Despite her achievements, Yao continues to do more. She teamed up with various organizations to come with volunteer programs that help less-fortunate women start promote micro-enterprises and livelihood activities. These include the Philippine Livelihood Marketing Corporation (PHILMACO), Tinadakabahay, and ePinayStore.

The Philippine Livelihood Marketing Corporation (PHILMACO) is an intensive marketing campaign that promotes micro-enterprise products, boosts their sales, and ensures continuous production and sustainability of income. It provides assistance in product development and various capability and capacity buildup programs to improve the quality of beneficiaries' products and make them competitive in the market.

Aling Flor is one of PHILMACO'S more successful beneficiaries. This housewife's husband lost his job as a warehouse manager of Quantum Food. They have five out-of-school children. To feed the family, Aling Flor learned to make pancit habhab and used her skills to put up a business with an initial capital off PHP5,000.

The small business took care of the family's day-to-day needs. However, when demand for her product rose, and she needed more capital to produce more, Aling Flor was referred to microfinance institutions. She felt that the

required credit extension seminars were too time-consuming. So she turned to PHILMACO for help. PHILMACO granted her a loan so that she can continue her business. Inspired by the success of her business, Aling Flor, Yao and her colleagues in FILCHI put up a microfinance project that helps micro-entrepreneurs who find it hard to access credit.

The Neighborhood Entrepreneurship Livelihood Project or the Tindakabahay Project, on the other hand, is an economic empowerment program that provides women gainful employment by selling basic products every household needs.

This public/private sector partnership involves PFLCW Inc., Unilever Philippines, and the Tulay sa Pag-unlad, Inc. (TSPI) Development Corporation. The PFLCW coordinates, supervises, and monitors the program together with its partners. The LCW in each locality provides the manpower by recommending qualified women entrepreneurs to PFLCW. As private sector partner, Unilever oversees distribution of products, logistics as well as monitoring of the women entrepreneur's sales performance. The TSPI Development Corporation provides women entrepreneurs seed capital and monitors collection and payment of these loans.





Meanwhile, ePinayStore is a virtual shop that aims to mobilize and sustain microenterprises at the local level as it enables buyers, suppliers, and traders anywhere in the country to transact business anytime. It is an online micro business tool for small and micro Pinay entrepreneurs who do not have access to capital for expanding their business and marketing products. Yao wants ePinayStore to be a portal that will make every Pinays entrepreneur's dream come true.

Yao advises women to take courage and not be afraid of making mistakes, because it will help them learn and grow. She also wants women to face their problems, because doing so will make them better entrepreneurs, and most of all, better persons as well.

That is the secret of Yao's power. It is not for self-gain. It is for sharing with others. That's why it cannot help but grow stronger through the years.

That is volunteerism—self-generating, unselfish, empowering. Most of all, it is rewarding.

This is what Myrna Tang-Yao knew in her heart all along.

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This publication showcases the role and contributions of volunteerism in development and contains stories revolving around national and global development themes that support the Philippine Development Plan 2017-2022, Ambisyon Natin 2040 and the Sustainable Development Goals.



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