

# Regine Lim

An interview with an Icon

Interview by Stephen L. Doggett



**O**ver the last two years, I have had the great honour of interviewing some of the most notable figures in the world of pest management. The vast majority have been individuals well advanced in their career, some semi-retired, but most still actively contributing to the industry.

For this issue I have decided on a slightly different track, to interview a rising star; someone destined to be a future industry leader. Already she has the mammoth task of managing a 130-person strong pest management company, while still caring for a young family – a challenge that few men can ever truly appreciate! She also has a direct link to



Regine (front row, second from right) newly graduated from University Sains Malaysia, standing next to Prof. Chow Yang Lee, 2001.

the ICON featured in last issue having completed a Bachelor's degree under Prof. Chow-Yang Lee. More recently, she played a pivotal role on the Organizing Committee for the first FAOPMA Virtual Conference, which was arguably the most significant pest management event ever held. I am proud to present my colleague from the Organizing Committee, Ms Regine Lim.

**Thank you, Regine, for agreeing to be this month's ICON. Firstly, please tell the readers about your history in pest control?**

I graduated from University Sains Malaysia (Penang) as a certified entomologist in year 2001. Starting my career as an operation executive at Ridpest in Kuala Lumpur, I subsequently joined Ecolab as their Technical Manager in 2004. I rapidly progressed and learned fast to become their Southeast Asia Regional Manager where I managed the Pest Elimination Divisions in Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, and Indonesia. In 2010, I started my own pest management company, Ecogreen Pest Management Sdn Bhd back in Penang. In running and managing my own pest control business and operations, I have gained vast experience in managing diverse pest management projects across a wide array of industries in the country. Ecogreen was acquired in 2018 by Entopest Environmental Services and I was appointed as the General Manager to continue leading and managing the business.

### **Why did you wish to start your own pest management company?**

I worked in a local Pest Control Organization (PCO) and a Fortune 500 company for around 10 years over 2001-2010. I had a vision to develop a pest management company that comprises strength and culture from two different companies into one to deliver local customers' needs in different segments with an international standard.

### **So why did you decide to sell the company to Entopest? Was it then hard to work for someone else?**

I think most entrepreneurs are looking for self-development and business advancement. After running my own business for around seven years in Penang, I found there's limitation for my company to grow further with my own strength and limited resources. Besides, my team deserved a better opportunity in gaining more work experience and if possible, I can provide them with significant benefit in their life as well as their career path when they work with me.

No doubt working for someone else is hard but it is the same to running an own business. To me the most important thing is to find a good boss or business partner who continuously drives you towards success and shares significant strategies towards common goals. My boss, Lee Cheun Wei is a true leader and a visionary. Entopest has grown aggressively in the last three years and now has a strong presence in Malaysia and Southeast Asia. This company of 130 employees continues to expand and we all as a team are passionate in moving towards its vision of serving the broader international market in Asia and other regions.

### **As noted above, you completed your Bachelor's degree under Prof. Lee. How important was it to have a mentor like Chow-Yang and to what extent did he introduce you to the pest management industry?**

Chow Yang Lee is like family to me. We lived in a same island, Penang, and we shared common hobbies as Penangites; eating delicious street food and appreciating the best durian on earth



A picture of a modern business woman; Regine Lim, Managing Director of Entopest Environmental Services, Malaysia, 2018.

direct from the orchard. Ivy (Chow-Yang's wife) is a good cook; she bakes the best fruit cakes for me every year for Christmas. Chow Yang is very close to the pest control industry in Malaysia. In fact, I obtained my first job offer through his introduction to the industry even before my final year exam. He is my mentor since day one, showing me a life example as a professional pest manager, and selflessly contributing his knowledge to the industry. He developed and trained good students and gave constructive suggestions to his students especially when we wanted to join the industry or making any important life decision. I'm grateful to have him as my guidance in the journey of bugging the bugs' career life!





A young Regine studying hard at the University of Sains Malaysia, 2000.

**In an industry so dominated by men, how hard was it for you to be accepted by the industry?**

For me is not that hard, maybe I carry some male-characteristics in ME, hahaha. I think self-confidence is essential for us to start working in a male-dominated industry; we should know our capabilities and strength to deliver the job. I always focus on what tasks to be completed not who can do or who can't do the job. When we are open with a positive mindset and willing to work with the team, I'm sure we will have a good working experience with male colleagues and staff. Good communication and a willingness to share good ideas allows us to mix well with co-workers and they will accept us as part of their team more easily. We need to show our commitment in delivering results as well. End result determines your status in the team, not the gender. Actually, I'm blessed that gender is no longer a major issue in our industry now, we

now have females winning service technician of the year and many capable women also holding important roles in pest control companies worldwide.

**Do some of the older men find it hard to have a lady boss? How do you deal with such people?**

When I just joined Entopest three years ago, we were still small with only 25 staff. Most of them had been with the company at least 5 to 10 years. I called a very first meeting to share my passion in this industry and my vision as a new leader to them. I made connection with them by acknowledging their past contributions and to specify the common goals we need to achieve together in the coming future as a team. For the past three years, I earned their respect by consistently doing what I said I would do, executing on lots of little achievements in our daily work, and being open about where my strengths and weaknesses were in my leadership. We always celebrate small and big achievement, so everyone feels their efforts are appreciated.


**How can you encourage more women into the field of pest management? Does FAOPMA have a role in this and how can they help?**

The Global Pest Control Services Market 2020-2024 reported our industry will grow with accelerating momentum over the next four



Regine lecturing during COVID-19 at Entopest.

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years. With so much growth and opportunity, we need more professional and passionate PCOs in the growing market and women workforce is the answer. First of all, we need to encourage employers to look into hiring women to fill up the positions created along the growth. We work closely with universities and colleges to recruit women talent after their graduation. I was the chairman of WomenBizSENSE who encourages women entrepreneurship in northern Malaysia. I always share the challenges and satisfactions working in the Pest Control Industry. Most women find it interesting working in our industry and they are often inspired to explore more into our field for job opportunities. I think talking and sharing details about our job experience is one of the effective ways to encourage more women to join us to become part of the industry. I think FAOPMA has been acting as a very important platform showcasing many talented women

leaders in our field through conferences speakers and also publications by women researchers over these years.

All of us in pest management have to work hand in hand to bloom this industry since we have plenty of potential even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**You have faced an added challenge of your career of working some distance away from your home. Correct me if I wrong, but every week you drive several hundred kilometres to your work place and then back home again at the end of the week. Obviously, this took you away from your family. So how did you deal with being a young mum away from your kids? I bet there were extra hugs when you return home!**

I have a very supportive family who back me

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on what I'm doing now. I'm with my team on weekdays in KL and I'm traveling back Penang every weekend to be with my family for the last three years. So far, I never missed any important family events and my kids are very independent. I told them about my vision and goal to achieve in my career and what I want to do for the industry. And they are part of my journey to fulfill these dreams. Since I'm going back to Penang every week so there's not much of difference at home for my absence as everyone are busy with work and school during weekdays, in fact we spend quite a bit of quality times during weekend. I want to thank my husband Elvin and my parents in law who really take good care of the kids while I'm away. In work, I'm grateful that my boss gives me full freedom on my leadership to manage the four branches in Peninsular Malaysia, so I can plan my time for both family and work effectively yet not affecting the end result that we wanted to

accomplish.

## What has been the biggest challenges the industry has faced during your time?

I think the biggest challenge the industry in Malaysia has faced is the lack of innovation and new technology to manage critical pest issues. But with the new generation of entrepreneurship coming up recently, we found more exciting products in the market. Besides, the new generation of PCOs are now very open and with initiatives to offer new methods and devices to manage pest issues on site. I would say there are more resources now we can reach out to be more professional and innovative in proposing an effective pest management program. I'm in the best era where I can still learn from the experienced industry gurus who have managed PCO businesses for decades, while I can also grow



and develop together with the next generation of PCOs to come to the future.

**Please tell the readers how the COVID-19 pandemic has changed your business and its practices.**

COVID-19 changed the way how we communicate in pest management services. Internally we learned to remotely manage the operational teams to deliver services efficiently during the movement control order. We also explored mass sanitizing and disinfecting projects in private and government sectors against coronavirus, and was aggressively involved in community services to flatten the curve. This is also the time we work hand in hand with our customers during the critical time. Despite the limited resources we had during the pandemic, we have to fight pest infestations in the surrounding environment,

especially dengue cases, which represented another threat to the residence in Southeast Asia. I think COVID-19 made us realise that we have to go back to the fundamental requirements of a PCO in delivering the core objective of our business; being an exterminator to improve the public health of the community.

**What are the challenges the pest control industry will face in the future?**

I foresee the limited selection of professional pesticides for public health in the market and the implementation of more stringent regulation makes pest management more difficult in future. Besides, the availability of DIY pest control products is the biggest competition and allow end users to consider pest control services as least priority when come to household pest management. However, I think PCOs need to focus



Regine and colleagues enjoying the 2019 FAOPMA-Pest Summit in Korea.

on grooming quality service technicians to fight this market trend. Professional control services will still grow significantly with the high demand from Pharmaceutical and Food Processing industrial in near future.

### **What do you think that Malaysia can teach the rest of the world about pest control?**

Malaysia is still considered a developing nation and we have much to learn from the more advanced countries. Pest management in our region is a growing industry. We are slowly emerging to adopt the innovations and technologies that has spurred the growth in US and Europe. As a home-grown PCO, we may not have the capabilities for the research and development, and have limited expertise to develop pest innovations, but we can adopt and adapt these innovations and technologies to suit

our local operations to spur the growth.

What I consider a strong point of our local PCO is our local corporate culture in our pest management business that has been in existence for the past 40 years. The current licensed 1900 local PCOs that has proliferated the industry as compared to only about five International PCO in this country is a testimony to this fact.

And I believe that in a large measure what makes a Malaysian PCO organization successful is its distinctiveness. PCO that have strong and unique cultures generally experience excellent performance which implies why many of the most successful PCO organizations today are thriving and growing because, in large part, of their unique and strong styles and values towards local corporate culture. Certain kinds of organizational cultures promote learning and information-sharing. In these environments of openness and



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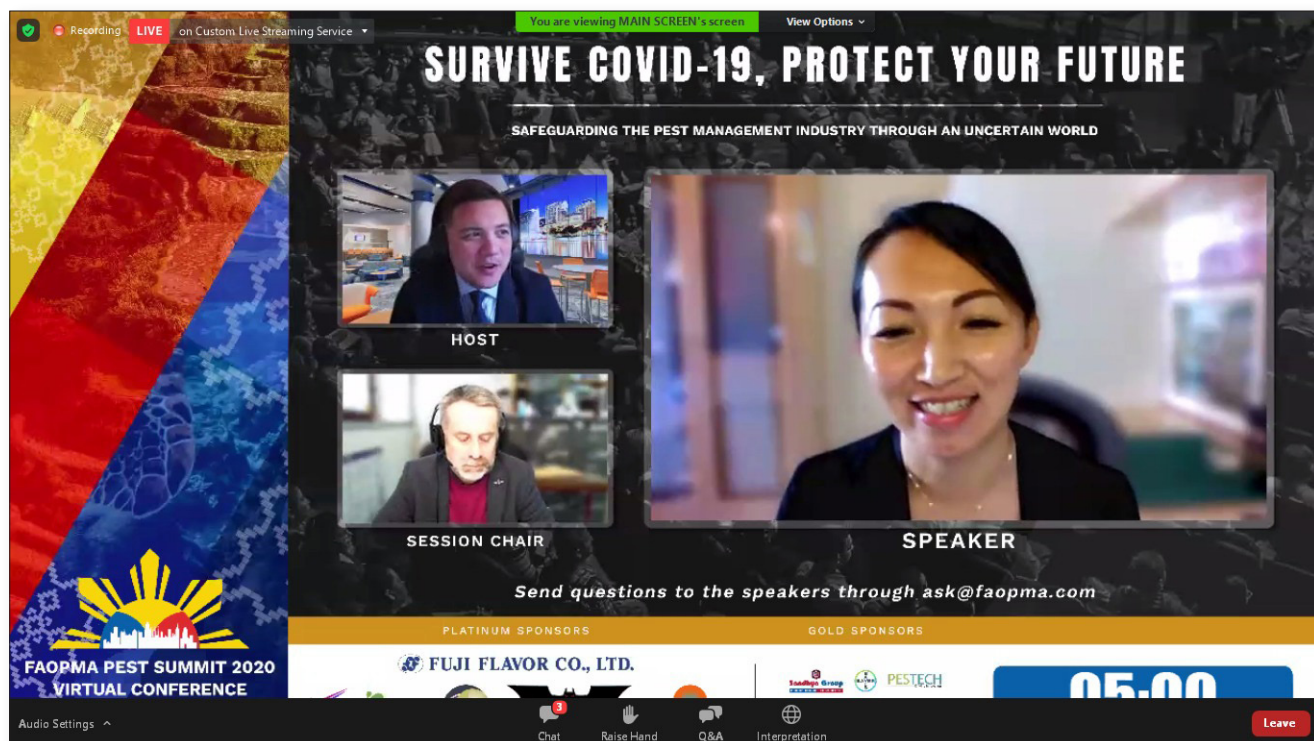


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Regine Lim speaking at FAOPMA-Pest Summit 2020 Virtual Conference. Regine's topic was "Professionalism in a COVID world; protecting employees and customer retention"

trust, much less investment in formal training is necessary. They get work done when they say they will. They answer the phone when a client calls. They offer solutions when problems come up. Such a culture of dedicated staff whose goal is to ensure their clients is always satisfied with the services provided. We believe in constant dialogue and communication with our employees to ascertain and gauge their happiness quotient as well as obtain valuable feedback on what they expect from the organization. This approach makes employees feel valued.

Our local corporate culture is unique and it goes a long way in establishing greater cohesion in the PCO and an atmosphere of cooperation among our staff and customers. And I think this is the beauty of Malaysian PCOs I love to share with you all here.

### **What role does FAOPMA have in ensuring that there is technical excellence in the industry to the future?**

Continue support on technical information and communication across all regions are an

important task undertaken by FAOPMA to ensure the industry remains professional and deliver service excellence technically and scientifically into the future.

### **What is your most proud achievement to date?**

When I attended my very first international pest conference of FAOPMA back in year 2007 in Taipei, that event inspired me to become a speaker one day to this esteem community. Thus, speaking in FAOPMA Pest-Summit Virtual Conference 2020 as a speaker is my most proud achievement. Even though it was just a Virtual Conference, I feel honoured to be part of it and getting good feedback from the delegates. I achieved my dream here that I once visioned. Besides, I found my 3M; humble Mentors, caring Mates, and potential Mentees in this beloved industry which I worked for the last 20 years with and I will continue to stay passionate and to love it. ■

*Thank you Regine for your insights and truly wonderful interview.*