

Lily Chan, *Toyo*. Australia: Black Inc., 2012. 272 pp. ISBN 9781863955737.

Australia's public policy on multiculturalism is seen to be one of the most successful contemporary public policies not only in Australia but possibly also outside it. However, there is a growing concern now that it is not doing very well for a number of reasons. Part of the reason is the disinterest and reluctance of the second generation migrants (who were born and bred in Australia) to embrace their parents' cultural heritage and sustain the richness of their culture. With ageing first generation migrants and a seeming lack of successors willing to maintain the various cultures found within Australia's diverse communities, multiculturalism could soon be a thing of the past.

For this reason, Lily Chan's memoir on her grandmother, *Toyo*, represents a fresh hope, as it entails a young Australian from a very mixed cultural background, writing about and documenting the kind of cultural differences which have made Australia what it is today.

Lily Chan is a writer, artist and lawyer who was born in Kyoto, but raised in Narrogin, a city which is located 192 km southeast of Perth in Western Australia. Chan, who began writing at 10, lives in Melbourne now. In a radio interview with Natasha Mitchell in 2012, Chan revealed the process of writing the memoir of her grandmother, who was aware that her life narrative was being written by her grand-daughter. "Don't write anything embarrassing," warned *Toyo*. Lily Chan admitted that while she did extensive research on the history and society in which her grandmother lived, in addition to contacting the people in Japan who shaped the background of the memoir, much of the content was also creative invention. For example, she invented the conversations which took place between Ryu (*Toyo*'s Chinese husband) and *Toyo* (born before the Second World War in Osaka, also of interesting parentage –an unmarried Japanese mother and a Japanese father living in China). The creation of these conversations has to happen since writing a memoir would rely a lot on how much people are willing to share and which (selective) memories are permissible for public consumption. Lily Chan went through old albums and studied the history of unmarried women in the 1930s, studied Chinese migrants to Japan, and looked at marriages of Chinese men to Japanese women during this extremely tense period between the two countries. *Toyo* is a memoir that weaves stories of migration of three generations of a Japanese family not only from one country to the other (Japan-China-Japan-Australia) but also from one belief system to another (Chinese ancestral belief to Sai Baba). *Toyo* is indeed an extraordinary memoir because of its rich tapestry of histories, cultures and beliefs which hold together a number of major world civilisations from India to China to Japan and Australia.

The memoir begins with the background story of Toyo's mother, Kayoko, an intelligent and ambitious young woman, living on one of the islands in southern Japan. Kayoko is described as a non-typical Japanese girl – her eyes are blue-green and for an island girl, she shows extraordinary signs of intelligence. For example, on her trip to Nagasaki, she buys not one book but several, on human anatomy, physiology, disease and treatment because she dreams of becoming a nurse. Her father is depicted as a typical Japanese islander. He burns the books, beats his ambitious daughter and insists that she marry just like his other daughters (4).

Through the narration of this hardship, Toyo's mother is portrayed as a tough woman who knows what she wants. When an opportunity arrives for her to escape the small island, she seizes it despite knowing that she will be working in China as a maid to a rich Japanese couple. "I can learn quickly, I'm smart, I'm tough," says Kayoko to her future employer.

This is how Kayoko is projected throughout the memoir: smart and tough. She becomes pregnant by her Japanese employer, Mr Takahashi. However, he is a responsible man who provides Toyo's mother with shelter and possibly financial support, enough for Toyo's mother to start a small café and live independently. There are a few visits from Mr Takahashi after this, and on one occasion he takes Toyo to meet her stepbrother and dance with him.

Toyo grows up in the religion of her mother, praying to the gods in the pre-dawn in front of a small wooden shrine and watching her mother throw out the day-old water which she says would have absorbed the day's impure thoughts, ghosts and evil spirits (p.8). Despite growing up in an all-Japanese environment and evincing this trace of strong attachment to Japanese culture, Toyo learns early of the existence of other foreign cultures. Her mother plays music by Vivaldi, Handel and Bach in her café; and with an absent father who occasionally visits from China, Toyo learns early the meaning of foreignness and travelling abroad. When she marries Ryu, a Chinese minority living in Japan, she is aware that she will lose some friends. What shocks and saddens her is the loss of her identity, on paper, as a Japanese woman (88) as her name is changed to a Chinese name, Dong Yang Zhang.

Toyo migrates to Western Australia through her son Yoshio, possibly in the mid 1970s or early 1980s when the immigration policy on non-Europeans loosened up; most Japanese migrants arrived in Australia from 1981 onwards. It was also a period in which the teachings of Sai Baba became influential outside India with many followers who were familiar with singing *bhajans* (devotional songs taught by Sai Baba so often mentioned in *Toyo* as the whole family converts to the religion and turns vegetarian). It is indeed fascinating to read about this identity change and the readiness of a Japanese family living in Australia to celebrate the "otherness" of the 'other' and yet, still be part of an

Australian community (Toyo participates in local community by teaching young Australians in Narrogin how to make origami, and cooking them rice pizzas).

Lily Chan's willingness to share her family's life narratives has enabled us to appreciate the sacrifices made and hardships endured by those who travelled many oceans to build a hopeful life in a new land. A quick glance at the statistics in the 2011 Census will convince those who are worried about "green-tea drinking invaders" taking over Australia that it will not happen, because 92% of people living in Australia were either born there or came from another English-speaking country like the United Kingdom or New Zealand and because the Australian government puts a limit on the number of refugees entering Australia in any year.

There will only be one Toyo and *Toyo* is a reassuring memoir which testifies that Australia continues to be a welcoming nation for people from different cultural backgrounds, and continues to celebrate its diversity.

Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf
International Islamic University Malaysia