



Translingual Bodies: Constructing the Modern Child in Early Colonial Taiwan's *National Language (Kokugo) Readers* (1900–1913)

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Abstract

Children's literature from colonial Taiwan has long been marginalised by post-war political and linguistic conditions, leaving its literary significance insufficiently examined. This article investigates the first edition of the *National Language (Kokugo) Readers* (*National Language (Kokugo) Readers* is used at first mention for clarity. Thereafter I use the shortened form *Kokugo Readers* throughout for consistency and readability) for *kōgakkō*, the government school for local Taiwanese pupils, treating them as early works of modern children's literature whose pedagogical design and translingual textuality shaped children's literary formation in early twentieth-century Taiwan. While existing scholarship approaches the *Readers* as instruments of Japanese colonial governance, focusing on schooling, language policy, and the inculcation of Japanese imperial norms, their literary textures, such as languages in use, narrative structures, and the interplay between text and illustration—have rarely been analysed. Little attention has been paid to how these features cultivate children's narrative imagination or model ways of representing everyday life. Departing from policy-centred approaches, this article draws on Lydia Liu's concept of 'translingual practice' and examines how Japanese prose, classical Sinitic elements, and locally situated elements were mediated and juxtaposed within the *Readers'* narrative and illustrative content. This paper argues that the first edition of *Kokugo Readers* for *kōgakkō* functioned as a translingual site where modern childhood is produced, not through equivalent exchange, but through the persistent negotiation between text and image, and the forced negotiation between host and guest language and the translingual body.

Note on Conventions: Chinese and Japanese names in this article are generally presented in the traditional surname-first order (e.g., Katō Shunjō, Hsu Pei-hsien), consistent with the historical context and East Asian conventions. Exceptions are made for scholars who publish primarily in English or use Western given names (e.g., Lydia Liu), whose names appear in the order used in their publications. Additionally, Japanese terms and titles from the colonial period are cited using traditional characters (kyūjitai) to reflect the original historical documents.

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Keywords *National Language (Kokugo) Readers* · Colonial childhood · Translingual practice · Linguistic negotiation · Visual pedagogy

Introduction

At the point of initial encounter with the first edition of the *National Language (Kokugo) Reader* for *kōgakkō*, young readers are confronted not with a harmonious complementarity of text and image, but also the lives of the colonised through the colonisers' lens, a juxtaposition where word and image collide to evoke new consciousness. Across the pages, the written text presents a range of didactic materials, including moral fables, descriptions of everyday habits, and elementary scientific knowledge, reflecting the *Readers*' function as instruments of linguistic training and social instruction. From a linguistic perspective, the textbooks are oriented towards the teaching of a standardised Japanese register, foregrounding normative forms of vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence patterning. These aims are further reinforced by illustrations accompanying the text, depicting traditional Taiwanese architecture, scenes of family life, marketplaces, and urban streetscapes, including shop signs written in Sinitic characters. Interspersed throughout this visual repertoire are rural rice-field landscapes, Qing dynasty clothing, traditional hairstyles, and Japanese elements. Beyond the interplay of texts and images, these readers further complicate the linguistic landscape by including Taiwanese Minnan summaries transcribed into Japanese kana, a feature that intensifies the diversity of linguistic traditions. This configuration of text and image ruptures the traditional framework of Qing-era Taiwanese pedagogical materials, which relied solely on written Sinitic language with no visual illustrations. Through the use of multiple linguistic codes, narrative styles and the juxtaposition of illustrations, the *Readers* place young readers in a 'negotiated space' of modern tensions. Furthermore, it forces a re-evaluation of the conventional narrative that views children's literature in colonial Taiwan as a monolingual system of monolithic Japanese.

Current scholarship on *Kokugo Readers* has predominantly focused on the dimension of colonial language policy. Scholars claim that Japanese colonial rule in 1895 reshaped Taiwan's educational and linguistic landscape by establishing a stratified school system in which Japanese was positioned as the primary medium of instruction and civic formation (Komagome 2019, pp. 152–160; Hsu 2020, pp. 3–10). Central to this project was *kokugo*, which functioned not as a neutral label for the Japanese language but as a historically constructed national-language category. Ueda Kazutoshi's 1894 speech framed *kokugo* as the 'spiritual blood' (*seishinteki ketsueki*) unifying the national body and the national state (Chou and Hsu 2003, p. 29; Lee 2010, pp. 88–90). This 'single language' functioned as a cornerstone of modern state ideology (Gottlieb 2018; Yasuda 2016). In colonial Taiwan, *kokugo* functioned as the authorised national language through which schooling, cognition, and participation were institutionally channelled (Chou 2022, pp. 8–11, Hsu 2003, p. 33). The textbooks authorised for colonial schools were officially titled *National Language (Kokugo) Readers*, designed for teaching *kokugo* as the most important school subject. However, it is crucial to recognise that as colonial primary schooling was organ-

ised along racial lines—*shōgakkō* for Japanese children, *kōgakkō* for local Taiwanese pupils, and *bantō kyōikusho* for Indigenous children—each furnished with its own authorised *Kokugo Readers* (Yoshino 1927; Tsurumi 1977; Wen 2009). This arrangement created distinct reading materials for each racial group in the early colonial period (Tsurumi 1977; Komagome 2019).¹ Given the multiplicity of *Kokugo Readers* across school tracks and publication phases shaped by changing educational policy in colonial Taiwan, this article confines its analysis to the first-phase *Kokugo Readers* for *kōgakkō* (1900–1913).

Existing scholarship often treats *Kokugo Readers* for *kōgakkō* as relatively stable instruments for imparting state ideology for local Taiwanese children. Yet such a view risks flattening the fifty-year span of Japanese rule into a single, homogeneous policy regime. It frequently underestimates how tensions between text and image participate in shaping a child's cognitive and interpretive labour. Within the classroom as an institutional setting, multiple contingencies generate marked discrepancies between governmental language policy, formal instructional aims, textbook design, and everyday pedagogical practice. These readers are repeatedly revised in step with changing political priorities, where analyses that rely chiefly on policy-level generalisations—without sustained close reading of textual and visual particulars—tend to produce accounts that are overly broad and ultimately reductive. Secondly, in the absence of a unified educational system prior to the colonial era, these *Readers* emerge as a formative instrument of standardisation. Conceived for a colony-wide audience of Taiwanese pupils rather than a fragmented local readership, they represent one of the earliest endeavours to establish a uniform textual environment on an island-wide scale. Their significance therefore exceeds political function alone: the *Readers* participate in the construction of modern childhood and in the circulation of translated forms of modernity under conditions shaped by colonial encounter. In this process, they operate as sites where linguistic boundaries are repeatedly negotiated and redrawn, as competing resources are organised into a standardised pedagogical form.

This article examines institutional and cultural reconfiguration in colonial Taiwan and does not take Japan as a developmental benchmark. The formalisation of modern children's literature in Japan was itself a gradual process that continued into the early twentieth century. (Miyakawa 1996; Inoue 2018, pp. 61–66). It thus identifies a research gap in colonial Taiwan: the transition from traditional, script-heavy premodern Chinese primers to the first edition of *Kokugo Readers* for *kōgakkō*, which integrated text and illustration. This paper argues that the first edition of *Kokugo Readers* for *kōgakkō* functioned as a translingual site where modern childhood was produced, not through equivalent exchange, but through the persistent negotiation between word and image, and the forced negotiation between host and guest languages and the translingual body. This shift manifests a complex negotiation of cultural boundaries across diverse languages and imagery. In the study of children's literature in colonial Taiwan, an effective theoretical framework is still lacking for a rigorous analysis of the intricacies of such negotiation during this period of historical transformation. By reclaiming the *Readers* as a corpus of children's literature, this research exam-

¹ It was not until the late colonial period that efforts were made to standardise the use of *Kokugo Readers* across schools.

ines how these literary and visual strategies operate within an authorised institutional regime to model a new reality for the modern subject. It addresses three questions: How did the ‘re-translation’ of Japanese pedagogical concepts and language in the *Readers* create a ‘hypostatized equivalence’ that fundamentally altered the traditional Chinese understanding of the child? How do the illustrations act as visual translanguaging practices, negotiating the gaps between the ‘guest’ modern concepts and the ‘host’ cultural landscape to discipline the child’s perception? To what extent did these literary and visual strategies model a translanguaging everyday life that transformed the child from a domestic ‘disciple’ into a subject of modern childhood?

To unpack the aforementioned disjunctions between text and image, this study employs a theory-driven close reading of archival primary sources, specifically the first edition of the twelve-volume *Kokugo Readers* for *kōgakkō*. Drawing on Lydia Liu’s (1995) framework of translanguaging practice, this study conceptualises pedagogical mediations not as neutral or reciprocal exchanges, but as historically situated processes structured by colonial asymmetries. Under this paradigm, modern concepts and representational norms are selectively authorised, re-articulated, and constrained. In such an institutional regime, translation functions as more than mere linguistic transmission. It operates as a regulatory mechanism through which the meanings of ‘modernity’ and ‘childhood’ are negotiated under the pervasive conditions of supervision and correction in early colonial Taiwan. In framing the corpus as a site of translanguaging negotiation, this paper deconstructs the text through four interconnected analytical layers. First, it employs linguistic analysis to interrogate how lexical choices respond to colonial linguistic hierarchies. Second, it applies narrative analysis through the lens of graded narrativity. Third, it conducts visual analysis, treating illustrations as intentional acts of visual translation. Finally, it scrutinises the formation of the bodily subject, focusing on training and discipline within the corpus. Central to this approach is the conceptualisation of the ‘translanguaging body’, which moves beyond abstract linguistic conditions to foreground how cross-register mediation is rendered legible as embodied conduct through the *Readers*’ formal routines—occurring amidst the inherent imbalances and structural constraints of the colonial project. Through the deconstruction of these analytical fragments across multi-dimensions, this article reconstructs how these negotiated processes collectively formulate a modern child subject within the colonial context.

The paper is organised as follows. It begins by establishing the historical and linguistic context, tracing the transition from premodern Chinese primers to the emergence of the *Kokugo Readers*. It then reviews existing scholarship on the *Readers* to identify the analytical gap addressed in this study. Next, it sets out Lydia Liu’s concept of translanguaging practice as the primary analytical framework. The analysis that follows offers a close reading of the corpus, examining word–image dynamics and forms of bodily discipline as mechanisms of translanguaging negotiation. The conclusion considers the implications of these mechanisms for understanding how colonial pedagogy produced modern childhood.

The Translingual Landscape: From Premodern Chinese Primers to the *Kokugo Readers for Kōgakkō*

The multilingual and hierarchically stratified linguistic ecology of Qing Taiwan constituted a critical historical precondition that shaped how children's educational texts later negotiated script, speech, and readership under Japanese rule. Taiwanese Minnan, which developed through long-term convergence between Quanzhou and Zhangzhou speech, served as the dominant vernacular of the population. Hakka communities were concentrated in the Taoyuan, Hsinchu and Miaoli regions and in the Six Settlements in the south (Tai 2007, p. 91; Hung 2019). Indigenous languages continued to be maintained among both Highland and Plains groups. By contrast, *Guanhua* (Mandarin) was largely confined to Qing officials from northern China and remained unintelligible to most Taiwanese (Chen 2021, p. 6). Administrative communication, therefore, required interpreters and reinforced linguistic segmentation. In written culture, however, Literary Sinitic functioned as a supra-regional medium whose semantic accessibility did not depend on a shared spoken language (Chen 2021; Kin 2021; Saitō 2021). This structural bifurcation, in which local vernaculars shaped everyday life while Literary Sinitic anchored elite textuality, created a communicative environment in which written culture operated independently from children's linguistic repertoires and later compelled the *Readers* to develop new narrative, visual and graded strategies of textual mediation.

Children's instructional materials in the late Qing further revealed the limitations of this bifurcated system and exposed a pedagogical model that was fundamentally misaligned with young readers. As scholars observe, primers for children were composed almost exclusively in dense Literary Sinitic (Hsu 2003, p. 64; Huang 2014, p. 24). The prestige of Classical Chinese and its centrality to the examination system shaped these materials. Instruction relied on collective recitation and memorisation of characters until the text was mastered (Lin 2019, pp. 228–230). Liu Chao-pin (2023) notes that teachers typically offered no explanation of meaning and required students to repeat the text verbatim. Lin Wen-bao later argues that such materials lacked narrative play, affective appeal and visual support, which are now regarded as foundational to children's literary formation (1996, pp. 228–230). As a consequence of this textual regime, Taiwan did not possess a body of child-centred literature before Japanese rule, and children did not encounter texts crafted to cultivate their cognitive, emotional or imaginative capacities. In terms of literary theory, this absence meant that children were not yet envisaged as readers with interiority, perceptual agency or narrative address, and they therefore occupied no position within a literary field oriented towards childhood. The rigidity of this textual culture, rooted in Literary Sinitic, rote learning and the disjunction between written and spoken forms, created the literary and perceptual void that the *Readers* later sought to fill.

The transition from Qing rule to Japanese administration introduced a new ideology of language that reconfigured the relationship among script, visibility, and pedagogy, directly shaping the forms that child readers would adopt. Although *Guanhua* had initially been designated the official language, Japanese officials soon discovered that the majority of Taiwanese could not understand it. This resulted in administrative failures and communicative breakdowns (Taiwan Education Association 1939,

p. 6). The crisis in intelligibility became the impetus for the systematic promotion of Japanese as the central medium of instruction and governance (Yang 2011, pp. 18–24; Hsu 2014, pp. 33–34). Archival documentation from the Taiwan Education Association (J. Taiwan Kyōiku-kai) records that Japanese was established as the standard administrative language and that Taiwanese Minnan was categorised as *dogo*, a local vernacular, positioned as auxiliary support for Japanese acquisition (1939, pp. 255–257). The modern school emerged as the primary apparatus for enforcing this linguistic order. These reforms did not merely replace one language with another. They required a new mode of textual mediation that could align children's heterogeneous linguistic backgrounds with the colonial state's pedagogical aims.

The transition from premodern Chinese primers to the *Kokugo Readers* was therefore not merely a formalistic update in children's learning materials. It represents a fundamental rupture in the linguistic and visual regime of childhood. By establishing a new set of representational norms. This historical shift creates a crucial site for the enforced negotiation between traditional values and translated modernity, a process examined through the textual and visual strategies analysed in the following sections.

Rethinking the *Kokugo Readers* for *Kōgakkō*

Kokugo Readers for kōgakkō were textbooks used by children in Years One to Six (ages 7–12) in Taiwan's newly established government primary schools for Taiwanese pupils during the Japanese colonial period. Their publication during the Japanese colonial period provides valuable insight into the Japanese colonial government's evolving language policies and educational strategies (Tsai). Based on the publication sequence, scholars Hsu Pei-hsien and Chou Wan-yao classify the *Kokugo Readers for kōgakkō* into five editions (2003, p.34).² Following the chronological classification by publication year, Tsai Chin-tang's study further identifies five editions of the *Kokugo Readers* for *kōgakkō*. It attributes their differences to changes in colonial policy, developments in teaching methods, and increasingly nuanced understanding of Taiwanese society (Tsai 2007, p. 3). Building on Tsai's research, Chou and Hsu point out that the publication of the fifth edition of the *Kokugo Readers* was driven by the state of war. They reveal that the inclusion of pro-war ideology to meet wartime demands explains the necessity for this specific revision (Chou and Hsu 2003, pp. 41–42).

Research on the *Kokugo Readers* for *kōgakkō* largely frames them through the instruments of imperial ideology and national identity formation rather than as literary artefacts. Existing scholarships falls into two categories: macro-level accounts of colonial educational policy and micro-level examinations of selected texts. At the macroscopic level, the established historical foundations explain the *Kokugo Readers* for *kōgakkō*'s development. A system tracing of the five editions offers a compre-

²The five editions are: 1st ed., *Taiwan Kyōka-yō Kokumin Tokuhon* (1900–1902, Vols. 1–12); 2nd ed., *Kōgakkō-yō Kokumin Tokuhon* (1913–1914, Vols. 1–12); 3rd and 4th eds., *Kōgakkō-yō Kokugo Tokuhon* (1923–1933 and 1937–1942, Vols. 1–12 each); and 5th ed., *Kokugo* (1942, Vols. 1–4) and *Shotōka Kokugo* (1943–1944, Vols. 1–8).

hensive framework for understanding series-wide changes across the colonial period (Tsai 2016, pp. 10–11). Similarly, examination of the colonial education system demonstrate how these *Readers* function as key devices that organise knowledge and embedded *kokugo*-centred language policy within schooling (Tsu 2014, 2016, pp. 12–14). Within this framework, Japanese acts as a vehicle for transforming colonial children into imperial subjects (Lin 2019). The editorial history reveals specific pedagogical philosophies, such as those of Katō Shunjō (Chen 2016, pp. 8–9), while the pragmatic nature of the *Readers* emphasises the transmission of functional knowledge and everyday skills (Fan 2016, pp. 5–7). Collectively, these textbooks represent an evolving ideological field that shapes the tripartite formation of the “citizen,” the “national,” and the “imperial subject” (Tai 2016, pp. 4–7; Tsai 2001).

At the micro-level, close readings of specific editions provide deeper insights into the *Kokugo Readers* for *kōgakkō*. Analysis of the third-edition of *Readers* identifies them as central to ideological transmission, while subsequent examinations of illustrations across all five editions demonstrate how visual representation shapes the imagery of Taiwanese people (Chou 2003, pp. 7–55; 2004, pp. 87–147). Other research focuses on the content headings of the first and second editions (Tsai 2003, pp. 54–58). Regarding the first edition specifically, linguistic analysis of lexical features—including stylistic register, part-of-speech distribution, and word selection—argues that this initial version helped establish a model for standard Japanese usage, extending its influence even to mainland Japan (Nakada 2003, pp. 93–137). Furthermore, investigations into *dogo yomikata* (vernacular reading) clarify the linguistic mechanisms that guided children through unfamiliar vocabulary by using *kana* to denote local Taiwanese pronunciation (Tomita 2003, pp. 143–158).

Research on the first edition remains uneven: studies of illustration frequently treat images without close attention to their textual framing, and quantitative work often narrows its scope to formal elements such as title structures. (Chou 2004, pp. 87–147; Tsai 2003, pp. 45–58). Despite the foundational contribution of lexical studies, the multilingual literacy practices of Taiwanese children often remain bracketed off from analysis. (Nakada 2003, pp. 96–137). Additionally, although linguistically rigorous, research on phonetic rendering does not fully address how the use of the Taiwanese vernacular simultaneously served pragmatic purposes and reinforced the hierarchy between Japanese and the local tongue (Tomita 2003, pp. 145–158).

While existing scholarship on the *Kokugo Readers* for *kōgakkō* has offered valuable insights into their institutional and political contexts, it tends to approach the series from a predominantly top-down perspective, which leaves the specific historical positioning and internal linguistic dynamics of the first edition under-examined. As the earliest volume in the series, the first edition emerges at a moment of transition from the preceding regime, a temporal positioning that has rarely been examined in detail. Moreover, although the first edition displays particularly complex patterns of linguistic interaction, existing studies have largely foregrounded its political implications, rather than attending to the translingual processes operating within the text and image itself. Consequently, to ensure analytical clarity, all subsequent references to the *Readers* in this study denote this initial version, unless otherwise specified.

Although the *Readers* were originally compiled as school textbooks, their narrative organisation and linguistic texture exhibit features commonly associated with

modern children's literature. Before turning to their literary qualities, it is necessary to clarify the ideological and aesthetic boundary between textbooks and children's literature. This is because children's texts frequently perform didactic and epistemic work, rather than functioning solely as entertainment (Nodelman and Reimer 2003). On this view, the central enquiry is relational, focusing on the question of address and authority: 'Who speaks, and on whose behalf?' (Butler and Reynolds 2014, pp. 1–8).

When such texts are conceptualised as 'invisible textbooks', they are seen to construct distinct moral worlds through narrative form (Nikolajeva 2016). This dual positioning matters because it draws attention to the ways in which institutional regulation and readerly latitude coexist within children's writing (Reynolds 2007). Early children's texts, in other words, often align narrative pleasure with normative instruction, making their functional overlap with formal pedagogy analytically consequential (Stephens 1992). Within this theoretical framework, scholarship on children's literature understands authority as mediated through textual form and reading position, rather than imposed upon child readers through direct injunction (Kidd 2020).

Accordingly, to extend the question of how authority is mediated to the level of corpus itself, an analytical framework is required that can account for how linguistic and pictorial forms, processes of translation and transliteration, and cultural authority are negotiated and reconfigured within asymmetrical relations. Lydia Liu's (1995) concept of translingual practice provides precisely such a theoretical tool. However, while her framework has significantly advanced our understanding of meaning-production across linguistic and cultural boundaries, her focus remains primarily situated within elite intellectual discourse and the textual resemanticisation of the May Fourth Movement in China (Huters 1998). This emphasis offers limited conceptual space for analysing how negotiation operates within state-mandated pedagogical settings or through the multimodal interaction of text and image. Furthermore, her framework remains largely discursive, often overlooking the bodily and affective processes through which subjects internalised new linguistic orders. The first edition *Kokugo Readers* for *kōgakkō* used in colonial Taiwan explicitly exposes these neglected dimensions. Their emphasis on routines of recitation and emotional modulation reveals a visceral aspect of language formation that necessitates an expansion of Liu's original analytical scope.

Translingual Practice As Multilayer Negotiation

In her monograph *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900–1937* (1995), Lydia Liu proposes the concept of translingual practice to examine the dynamics of linguistic and cultural exchange during moments of historical transformation in China. Mediated largely through Japan, China's contact with Western languages and thought generated new linguistic forms that produced new words, meanings, discourses and representational modes (Huters 1998). These innovations were gradually incorporated into, and legitimised by, the Chinese language. Liu emphasises that 'translation' is not a mechanical correspondence but a dynamic process of negotiating meaning, which manifests as a power struggle between 'host' and 'guest' languages. (Larson 1996). This highlights

how new meanings are constructed through presumed equivalence across linguistic systems (Kong 1997) and how these provisional correspondences emerge through negotiation, contestation and processes of legitimation (Huters 1998). Framing linguistic encounter in this way enables an analytical move beyond a binary model of East–West influence and allows for a reframing that exceeds Edward Said’s reductive notion of Orientalism (Larson 1996).

This subtle authority operates not only within the narrative structure of the *Readers* but is more specifically enacted through the process of translingual practice. As Liu demonstrates, language is never a neutral medium of communication but a site of political and cultural struggle (Huters 1998). By moving the focus from monolithic ideological transmission to the dynamic exchange between the ‘national language’ (Japanese) and the local Minnan vernacular, Liu’s framework allows for an analysis of how meaning is negotiated within the ‘contact zones’ of the text in colonial Taiwan. In this light, the *Readers* function as a translingual space where the establishment of linguistic equivalence serves to facilitate the acquisition of the imperial tongue while simultaneously reorganising the subject’s indigenous knowledge.

The power dynamics within these contact zones, however, diverge significantly from Liu’s original model. While her analysis of modern China presupposes a ‘host’ language that actively absorbs foreign concepts (Liu 1995, p.26), the colonial pedagogical space operates through an inverted hierarchy within asymmetric relations of power. In this context, Japanese is imposed as the dominant host, forcing the Taiwanese Minnan vernaculars into a subordinate, guest-like position within their own territory. The *Readers* thus do not represent a voluntary cultural borrowing among elite intellectuals. Rather they constitute a structured linguistic displacement. This emphasis on elite discourse in Liu’s work leaves little conceptual space for analysing how such negotiation operates within state-controlled pedagogical settings, particularly those designed for non-elite.

Any application of this framework to pedagogical materials must also account for the visual and material processes through which meaning is mediated for the juvenile subject. This study operationalises ‘resemanticisation’ as a visual as well as a textual process to bridge the gap between linguistic focus and visual materiality. Rather than merely mirroring the written scripts, illustrations function as active agents of translation—an anchoring mechanism that transmutes abstract imperial ideologies into recognisable, everyday visual tropes. These images serve as a primary site of negotiation where the ‘foreign’ nature of the colonial order is domesticated through familiar local scenery.

Furthermore, this study conceptualises the ‘translingual’ as an intricate, multimodal interplay between Japanese text, Sinitic characters, and their corresponding visual illustrations. Reading the *Readers* through—and at times against—Liu’s framework reveals that translingual practice operates as a somatic technology that scripts the child’s body. Through standardised routines—ranging from the formalised act of attending school to regulated public behaviours like communal cleaning—the *Readers* facilitate a form of embodied translation. Here, the acquisition of the imperial tongue is inextricably tied to new regimes of physical conduct. In essence, this framework integrates language, narrative, imagery, and subjectivity into a singular analytical process. Beyond vocabulary acquisition, this sensory and intellectual dis-

ciplining—though striving for imperial order—facilitated the emergence of a distinct colonial subjectivity rooted in Taiwan’s specific social and material realities.

The First Edition of *Kokugo Readers for Kōgakkō* As a Translingual Site

This section undertakes a close reading of selected lessons from the first edition of *Kokugo Readers* for *kōgakkō* to examine how the first edition *Readers* articulated a modern concept of childhood through linguistic, narrative, visual, and bodily modes of representation.³ Drawing on Karasawa Tomitaro’s (1956) typology and Tsai Chin-tang’s (2003, p. 46) nine-part classification, this discussion focuses on the clusters most directly relevant to the multimodal strategies used in the *Readers*—namely Literature, Social Life, Social Institutions, and Everyday Life. These are the domains in which linguistic progression, narrative experimentation, visual organisation, and bodily regulation converge most consistently in the lessons analysed here.

Tsai’s quantitative findings further show that Literature (14.8%) and Ethics, Etiquette, and Hygiene (10.9%) form substantial components of the series (2003, p. 46), reflecting an orientation toward affective cultivation and behavioural training alongside descriptive engagement with everyday practices. Although Yoshino Hidekimi’s archival documentary recorded that the *kōgakkō* as institutions intended “to provide moral instruction and practical learning... and to ensure [children’s] proficiency in the national language” (1927, p. 194), the *Readers* present a more complex pedagogical design. Rather than relying on moral recitation, they reorganise knowledge into graded, child-oriented forms that interweave descriptive precision, narrative imagination, social practice, and sensory discipline. Within this structure, literature functions as a mediating field that links rational learning with affective experience and reshapes the sensory and cognitive conditions through which children apprehend their world. Guided by Lydia Liu’s concept of translingual practice, the analysis that follows examines four interrelated dimensions—linguistic negotiation, narrative pedagogy, visibility, and subject formation—through which the *Readers* shaped the emergence of the modern colonial child.

Cross-Linguistic Negotiation

The *Readers* reconstruct the relation between graph and sound through cross-linguistic transcription, rendering the act of reading itself a form of literary training in linguistic perception. It compelled children to apply Japanese phonetic readings to familiar Sinitic graphs, generating a tension between visual recognition and auditory estrangement. Beyond mere vocabulary acquisition, the introduction of Meiji neologisms—such as *shōnin* (merchant 商人), *shōgun* (general 將軍), *gakkō* (school 學校), *kikō* (climate 氣候), *kinsen* (money 金錢) constitute a foundational reordering of the colonial world, scripting new conceptual boundaries for the Taiwanese pupil. By forcing a disjunction between Sinitic visual forms and Japanese phonology, the

³ Unless explicitly stated otherwise, all textual and visual examples cited in this section are drawn from the first edition *Kokugo Readers* for *kōgakkō*.

Readers required children to re-apprehend familiar graphs within an entirely new conceptual field. This process did not merely teach new words. It established a modern infrastructure of thought defined and delimited by Japanese cognitive structures. Crucially, while this linguistic experience produced a marked effect of ambiguity, it was precisely within this ‘literary’ mode of disjunction that the colonial subject—the Taiwanese child—began to navigate the complexities of their new modern identity.

The tripartite notational system—consisting of Sinitic characters, Japanese phonetic readings, and the katakana-marked Minnan glosses systematically positioned at the close of the lessons—constituted a deliberate regime of linguistic negotiation. This arrangement compels pupils to navigate layered linguistic perceptions, fostering a unique cross-linguistic interpretive imagination (see Fig. 1). Through the repeated juxtaposition of written graphs, Japanese phonology, and katakana transcriptions of local expressions, the *Readers* transformed literacy into a polyphonic act of translingual and linguistic negotiation. Unlike Qing-period primers, which relied solely on Sinitic graphs, these *Readers* organised reading around a Japanese phonological regime, obliging pupils to shuttle continuously between visual forms, an externally imposed sound system, and the vernacular phrases rendered in katakana as lesson-closing summaries. Such habitualised oscillation moved beyond instrumental literacy toward a mode of linguistic play, in which children fashioned new narrative and conceptual orders, precisely through the labour of navigating linguistic difference.

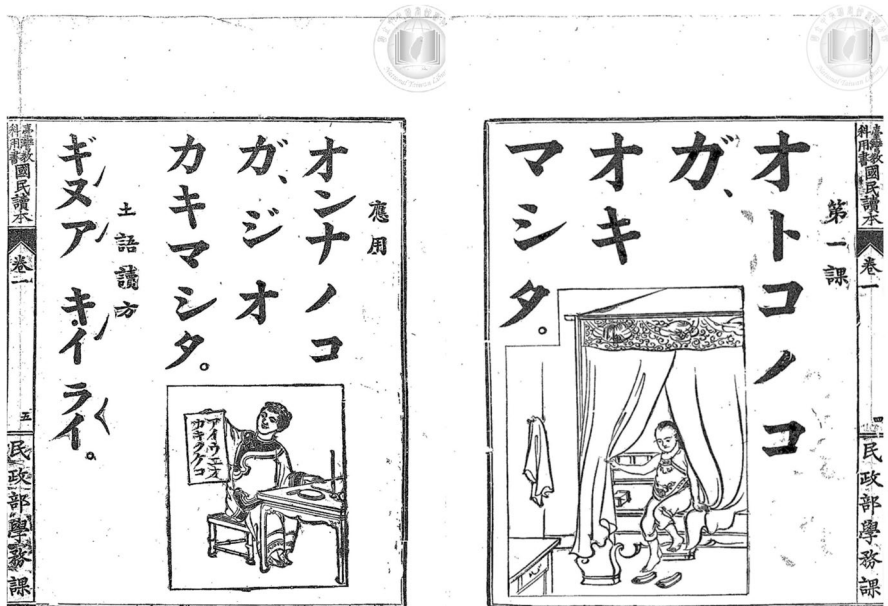


Fig. 1 Lesson One shows a boy rising from bed and a girl practising writing *katakana*, concluding with a *katakana* rendering of the Minnan phrase “the child gets up”, pronounced *kiänn-á kilai*. By requiring pupils to relate Japanese prose to a *katakana* transcription of local speech, the layout materialises a moment of linguistic negotiation between written Japanese and Minnan oral expression. *Volume 1, Lesson 1*. (Source: Courtesy of the Taiwan Studies Research Centre, National Taiwan Library)

Narrative Pedagogy: Literary Mediation of Ethical Sensibility

The *Readers* employ fables and everyday narratives to cultivate ethical sensibility through literary experience rather than prescriptive moral instruction. Instead of presenting ethics as explicit propositions, these texts invite readers to perceive moral meaning through rhythm, tonal modulation, and situational contrast. In *The Grasshopper and the Ant* (Vol. 6, Lesson 13), the alternation between light, leisurely pacing and steady, deliberate tempo stages the divergent consequences of indolent pleasure and diligent preparation. The grasshopper's winter predicament and the ant's secure survival allow the principles of foresight and labour to emerge from the narrative situation rather than from didactic assertion. *The Dog and the Shadow* (Vol. 5, Lesson 8) constructs an emotional drop following the dog's loss, creating an experiential understanding of the costs of greed without resorting to abstract moral categories. Domestic narratives likewise embed values such as punctuality, cleanliness, and consideration into quotidian action sequences—getting up (Vol. 1, Lesson 1), washing (Vol. 1, Lesson 3), greeting elders, bowing (Vol. Lesson 10)—rendering ethical relations perceptible through ordinary tonalities of family life. These narrative strategies exemplify the cultural dimension of *translingual practice*: ethical ideas are not transmitted through inherited cultural formulas but are reconstituted through new narrative frames, rhythms, and affective cues. For child readers, ethics is not taught. It is read from the unfolding story.

The portrayal of exemplary figures integrates action, affect, and decision-making, enabling virtue to acquire a situated and imitable significance rather than the status of an abstract label. The upper-level volumes feature a heterogeneous set of characters—Hamada Yahyōe (Vol. 11, Lesson 12), Confucius (Vol. 12, Lesson 11), Koxinga (Vol. 10, Lesson 13), Nonaka Kenzan (Vol. 12, Lesson 13), and Sunjiro (Vol. 9, Lesson 19)—each demonstrating how narrative reconfigures ethical posture in recognisably modern terms. Hamada's composure in the face of danger frames courage as a strategic synthesis of emotional control and resolute action. Confucius's (551–479 BCE) insistence on sustained learning articulates the unity of knowledge and practice through an intelligible pedagogical rhythm. Koxinga's (1624–1662) perseverance under adversity renders loyalty embodied and actionable, rather than merely emblematic. Nonaka's (1615–1664) diligence and public-mindedness reveal the connection between knowledge and communal benefit. By personally carrying his elderly mother to a distant hot spring every day to satisfy her love of bathing, Sunjiro situates the notion of family ethics within a subtle yet palpable emotional fabric.⁴ Collectively, these portrayals enact a cultural form of *translingual practice*: virtue is placed within new constellations of action, affect, and relational value, allowing ethical meaning to become transferable, comprehensible, and replicable across distinct cultural contexts. Children thus do not memorise moral nouns; they observe how ethical relations operate in lived situations. Moral understanding emerges through narrative aesthetics and situational guidance rather than through codified exhorta-

⁴ Birth and death years for Hamada and Sunjiro cannot be verified in the available sources. The names are reproduced as they appear in the *Readers*.

tion, which is precisely the mode of affective learning central to modern pedagogical paradigms.

Visuality, Space and Sensory Modernity

The visual programme of the *Readers* systematically teaches children not merely what to see but how to look at the world, turning vision into a foundational mode of literacy that shapes perception, language, and spatial understanding. In the introductory volumes, the images are not subordinate to the text. They function as a primary pedagogy of perception. Through composition, lines of sight, and depicted gestures, the illustrations train children in particular ways of behaving and looking. Scenes of sweeping the floor (Vol. 1, Lesson 4), practising character writing (Vol. 1, Lesson 1, 2, 4; Vol. 3, Lesson 10), seated posture (Vol. 1, Lesson 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10; Vol. 3, Lesson 10, 11), body disciplines (Vol. 2, Lesson 1, 2, 7; Vol. 3, Lesson 1, 3), or bowing to the elderly (Vol. 1 Lesson 10) are rendered with clear outlines and balanced arrangements, so that sensory values such as cleanliness, order, manners, and brightness are naturalised within the act of viewing itself. This education in *how to look* corresponds to what Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott term visual literacy: children learn spatial position, relational movement, and situational meaning through their engagement with images rather than through language alone (2013, p. 62). The school setting is especially instructive (Vol. 1, Lesson 7; Vol. 3, Lesson 8). Desks aligned in straight rows, a blackboard fixed at the visual centre, and the vertical axis connecting teacher and pupils collectively choreograph a regime of public space. Through repeated viewing, children acquire a sense of how to locate themselves within institutional environments and come to regard visual order as part of everyday normative experience. At the level of translingual pedagogy, these images also render words, actions, and spaces mutually legible. When children see pictures of sweeping, opening windows, or sitting properly, they simultaneously learn the corresponding Japanese vocabulary and the situations in which these actions occur. Cross-linguistic understanding is thus grounded in a visual-verbal mapping, in which the image provides a scaffold for integrating new lexical items and their referents. Vision does not simply reproduce the world. It becomes a sensory education in how to perceive the world and how to integrate external phenomena through an interlocking system of language and image (Fig. 2).

As children move into the higher volumes, the *Readers* extend this pedagogy of seeing to ever more expansive landscapes and social spaces, cultivating modern ways of looking at both Taiwan and the broader world while recoding these spaces through image-supported vocabulary. The more advanced books present harbours (Vol. 9, Lessons 10 and 11), steam locomotives (Vol. 7, Lesson 13), and cultivated fields that span different regions, using composition, scale, and vantage point to draw children into a narrative apprehension of space. In attending to these scenes, pupils learn to read environments as ordered sequences: machinery, transport, agriculture, and public infrastructure appear as a visible lexicon through which the world can be grasped as a system. Images of rice paddies (Vol. 5, Lesson 11, 15 and 16; Vol. 7, Lesson 6 and 11), rural villages (Vol. 5, Lesson 1, 2, and 10), mountains (Vol. 8, Lesson 2), climate (Vol. 12, Lesson 5), and seasonal change transform “Taiwan” from an abstract

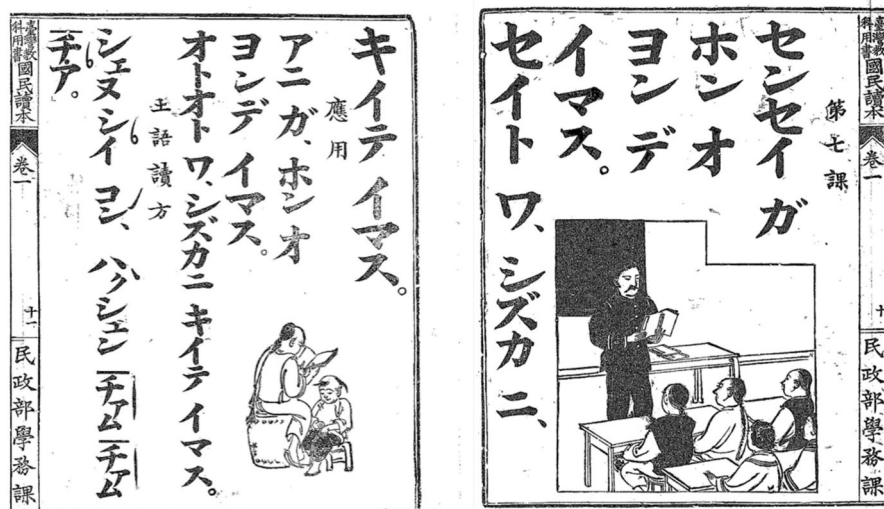


Fig. 2 A Japanese teacher in modern attire lectures in a Western-style classroom furnished with new desks and a blackboard, while students with shaved foreheads and a long queue typical of the Qing period sit attentively. *Volume I, Lesson 7.* (Source: Courtesy of the Taiwan Studies Research Centre, National Taiwan Library)

geographical name into a visually and conceptually organised entity—something that can be seen, named, and classified. The *Readers* thus develop a visual-geographical pedagogy in which place is learned through patterned ways of seeing. The hybridity of dress—Qing-style garments appearing alongside modern Japanese attire within the same visual frame—signals that these illustrations function not as neutral depictions of everyday life, but as composed sites in which cultural transition is actively staged and made visible. From the perspective of translingual pedagogy, these landscapes and cultural scenes also bear explicit linguistic weight. As children contemplate harbours, rice fields, hillsides, or ascending balloons, they simultaneously acquire the Japanese terms attached to these terrains and phenomena, so that geography, natural processes, and social spaces are renamed through Japanese vocabulary. This creates a cross-linguistic mapping between the visual scene, the verbal label, and the physical landscape. Through such acts of looking, children learn not only to recognise objects but to classify, name, and interpret the world across languages, incorporating both Taiwan and external spaces into an emerging modern sensory and linguistic map.

Child Subject Formation and the Pedagogical Body

The *Readers* construct the child not only as a linguistic learner but as an embodied subject whose posture, gesture, and comportment are shaped through codified visual norms. Across the early volumes, the child's body is repeatedly depicted as

an exemplary figure of learning—sitting upright, standing straight, placing hands neatly on the knees, and directing the gaze forward. These stylised poses materialise what Jacqueline Rose (1984) identifies as the adult projection at the heart of childhood representation: the child becomes a figure organised for observation, discipline, and pedagogical display. Perry Nodelman's (2008) insight that children's literature guides readers to emulate the behaviours it portrays is particularly resonant here. Actions such as sweeping, holding a book, or looking up attentively are rendered as reproducible bodily sequences, so that learning unfolds as an embodied, rhythmic practice rather than as the absorption of abstract moral principles. Within a translingual framework, these gestures function as material procedures that align sound, character, and bodily discipline, enabling children to internalise the tempo and authority encoded in the acquisition of language.

As the series progresses, the *Readers* position the child's body within intersecting fields of cultural transition and linguistic reorientation. Everyday actions—washing one's face, folding clothes, sweeping the floor—are arranged as sequential, imitable movements that narrativise ethical values and emotional dispositions. In this, the *Readers* exemplify Kimberley Reynolds's (2007) observation that children's literature constructs moral understanding through concrete behavioural models. The classroom setting further embodies what Nodelman (2008) terms the adult visual frame: the elevated teacher, the ordered rows of pupils, and the tightly directed lines of gaze together produce a body that is both observable and regulatable. Clothing intensifies this visual discipline. The juxtaposition of Qing-style long gowns with modern Japanese school uniforms renders the child's body a composite surface on which competing cultural forms are inscribed, transforming it into a site where linguistic transition, cultural re-symbolisation, and subject formation converge. Through these entwined visual, sensory and kinaesthetic strategies, the *Readers* fashion the modern child as an embodied interface through which literacy and obedience are simultaneously cultivated.

By aligning Sinitic visuality with Japanese phonology, translating civic and ethical ideals into child-oriented narratives, and orchestrating both visual and corporeal regimes of attention, the *Readers* restructured how children learned to see and to act. Through these practices, they fashioned a child capable of apprehending the world through new linguistic, visual and sensory frameworks. In doing so, they assumed the role of early modern children's literature. They offered children embodied models of seeing, feeling, and acting, and guided them in interpreting the world around them. In shaping both literacy and embodied subjectivity, the *Readers* reveal how colonial schooling configured childhood itself as a site of translingual negotiation and modern epistemic formation. This multimodal construction of the child underpins the broader argument developed in the conclusion.

Conclusion

Viewed across its linguistic negotiation, narrative pedagogy, visuality and subject formation, this study has reconsidered the *Readers* not only as instruments of colonial assimilation into transforming into imperial children, but as complex textual sites

where competing visions of culture, language and identity were negotiated. Through a close reading of the *Readers*, the analysis demonstrates that the construction of national belonging within these *Readers* was far from uniform or ideologically consistent. It was marked by an ambivalent coexistence of Qing imperial legacies and the emergent discourse of Japanese modernity. By foregrounding these ambivalences, the article makes three key contributions. First, it reframes the *Readers* as a locus of translanguaging mediation, where language education and visual illustrations function as sites for reimagining both childhood and modern subjectivity, rather than as a unidirectional tool of imperial pedagogy. Secondly, it extends Lydia Liu's notion of translanguaging practice beyond linguistic translation to include the intersemiotic operations that occur when images, diagrams, and visual layouts mediate between Japanese text and the child reader. By foregrounding these visual forms as sites of cross-linguistic negotiation, the project demonstrates how graphic and verbal sign systems jointly produced new modes of subject formation in colonial classrooms. Lastly, it contributes to the cultural history of early colonial schooling by demonstrating that ambiguity and hybridity coexist more than domination or resistance, which defines the construction of childhood in the *Readers*.

Through the reorganisation of literary genres, the rhythmic discipline of classroom reading, and the juxtaposition of illustrations that combined imagery of the old and the new, the *Readers* transformed linguistic instruction into a medium of cultural transition. The child who emerges from these texts is neither a passive recipient of moral guidance, nor merely a linguistic learner, but a composite figure formed through the interplay of narration, pedagogy, and visibility—a figure through whom the modern children's literature articulated its hopes for effective refinement and civic sensibility. The first phase of *Readers* thus invites us to view colonial textbooks not simply as a project of assimilation, but as a dynamic arena of linguistic negotiation and cultural reconfiguration, where childhood emerged through the unstable interplay between imperial legacies and modern aspirations.

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