Chapter 8

Images of Children in Modern Art in Taiwan: Public Messages Concealed in Private Depictions*

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8.1 Introduction

Modern art in Taiwan began during the Japanese colonial period (1895–1945), specifically at the official Taiwan Fine Arts Exhibition (Taiwan Bijutsu Tenrankai, or the Taiten) held in 1927. There it was labeled “new art.” As indicated by the inclusion of only two sections in those exhibitions, Eastern-style painting and Western-style painting, painting was the primary form of modern art in Taiwan. We should also note that the many private art associations that had existed prior to the Taiten did not develop exhibitions with public calls for entries. The holding of private, unofficial exhibitions positioned in opposition to the official Taiten only took place following Taiwanese artists’ formation of the Taiyang Art Association (Taiyō Bijutsu Kyōkai), which did not occur until 1934. At first, moreover, the Taiyang exhibitions (Taiyōten) showed only Western-style paintings; its Eastern-style painting section was not formed until 1940. Given, then, that the world of modern art in Taiwan was largely controlled by the Taiten, I focus in this chapter on works shown at that exhibition. Readers should also note that, since many of these works no longer exist, we are forced to rely on black and white images that appeared in exhibition catalogs, newspapers and magazines published during this period.

Research thus far has continued to state that modern art produced in Taiwan, especially landscape and still-life paintings, has no visible political or topical character. Many of the works depicting children discussed in this chapter have been interpreted in the same way; but is this, in fact, true? There are relatively few works of modern art from Taiwan that are either portraits of children or in which children are the theme. There are, however, some that do depict several children. Among the most famous is Singing Children (Utau kodomotachi, now entitled Chorus, 1943) by Li Shih-chiao, which depicts a chorus of children wearing military caps and uniforms. Other examples include Li’s Children in the Garden (Niwasaki no kodomotachi, 1941) and Hsueh

* Translation from Japanese into English: Ruth S. McCreery.
Wan-dong’s *Play* (*Yūgi*, 1938). In that painting, as the title suggests, we see children playing, a rare theme in modern art from Taiwan. *Play*, despite being an important work that was awarded the Governor General’s Prize (Sōtoku Shō), the Grand Prix in the Governor General’s Art Exhibition (Taiwan Sōtokufu Bijutsuten, known as the Futen), has not been carefully studied as a work of art.

This chapter is an attempt to examine these works that depict an extremely intimate scene, children at play, and extract the public messages concealed in the depictions of children in modern art from Taiwan, examining closely the choice of themes, the historical background, the garments worn by the children, and the settings in which they play. In the first section we will briefly review depictions of children in Taiwan prior to the Second Sino-Japanese War of 1937 to 1945 and attempt to provide a detailed analysis of their distinctive features. In the second section, we will attempt a comprehensive overview of works including children produced between 1937 and 1945. These will be divided into three categories: children at work, mothers and children, and children in groups. These will be compared with what might be called public representations of children produced during the war, in which children are depicted as “little citizens” (*shōkokumin*) performing labor service. Then, in the third section, we will look in more detail at the three paintings mentioned above, demonstrating concretely how public messages are embodied in the individual works. This chapter will also make clear that while, as in the modern art world in Japan, unofficial, private art exhibitions in Taiwan did counter the official exhibitions, they did not attain sufficient stature to rival them. Moreover, many Japanese artists working in what was then a Japanese colony had works selected for the official exhibitions. Thus, they, as well as Taiwanese artists, played a role in creating the world of modern art in Taiwan, and their work will be regarded in this chapter as part of the modern art produced in Taiwan.

### 8.2 Depictions of Children, 1927–1936

#### 8.2.1 The “Children’s Country” Created in Modern Japan

Let us begin by briefly considering the definition of “child.” In Japan it is conventional to distinguish infants and toddlers, defined as three years old or younger, from children, who are defined as aged four to thirteen.¹ In this chapter, however, the term “children” refers to both groups: all young human beings below the age of fourteen.

¹ Miyajima 2001, p. 9.