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A century of hands : work, communities, and identities among the Ayt Khebbash fossil artisans in a Moroccan Oasis

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Curriculum Vitae

Mayuka Tanabe was born on 16 June 1974 in Kyoto, and grew up in Thailand, Britain and Japan. She specialised in Art History and Film Studies at Kwansei Gakuin University. Following her early interest in the Chinese Communist Party, her BA thesis was on the representation of the Cultural Revolution in post-1970 Chinese films. After six months of affiliation to the Central Academy of Drama in Beijing to study Chinese performing arts and Mandarin, Tanabe enrolled in the University of Cambridge to pursue her research in the anthropology of China. Based on interviews and library work in Taipei and Xiamen, she wrote her MPhil dissertation on the Taiwanese investment and the building of social networks in Fujian Province in southern China. In 1999, she embarked on another research project at the University of Oxford (MLitt), focusing on the organisational culture of Taiwanese multinational enterprises in mainland China. This project involved twelve months of fieldwork in Shanghai at a Taiwanese multinational firm.

During her residence in Britain, Tanabe travelled extensively to northwest Africa and the Middle East, notably Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt, through which she discovered her strong connection to the desert and Islamic culture. Also influenced by the Burmese, Pakistani and Algerian Muslims in Oxford, she went to Damascus, Syria, in 2004 to study Classical Arabic and Politics and Society of the Modern Middle East at the French Institute (IFEAD). In 2009, she moved to Morocco to work as a lecturer of Academic Study Skills at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, and later at the Lebanese International University in Casablanca. At the same time, she engaged in social work as an assistant educator and a French teacher at a local NGO, 'Association Bayti', helping street children and impoverished families. Since 2011, affiliated to the Moroccan Centre for Social Sciences, Université Hassan II, Tanabe undertook her doctoral research in the Tafilalet town of Rissani, on the work practices of the Ayt Khebbash fossil artisans. She has been a Ph.D. candidate at the Leiden Institute for Area Studies, Leiden University, since 2014. Her current research interests include: Imazighen in North Africa, the Tamazight language, nomadism, and anthropology of work.

