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Book Review

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Takayanagi, Taeko. *Informal learning and literacy among Maasai women: Education, emancipation and empowerment*. New York: Routledge, 2020. 216pp. 9781032089874. £29.59. Pbk.

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In the last few decades, the progress of adult literacy in Africa countries has significantly transformed the landscape of local society. Educational scholar Takayanagi's recent monograph, *Informal learning and literacy among Maasai women: Education, emancipation, and empowerment*, demonstrates women's significant role in advocating adult literacy in Kenyan society. Going through this book's main contents and arguments, this review intends to discuss the inspirations and lessons that library professionals and researchers may take from reading this work.

Takayanagi's monograph is composed of seven chapters. They range from the framework of her study to the fieldwork she conducted in Kenya. In the first three chapters, Takayanagi primarily introduces the theatrical framework for the further concrete examination of African women and their involvement in informal learning. Those theories include but are not limited to postcolonial feminism theories, informal learning and adult literacy theories, and the relationship between women's emancipation and global development. These discussions pave the way for the subsequent account of her fieldwork in Kenya and analyze its outcome.

After outlining the methodologies and theories utilized in this research, the following chapters switch to her fieldwork in Kenya. Chapter 4 takes an overview of the cultural and social background of the field, the local society of Kenya, where Takayanagi conducted the research. After gaining independence and terminating the British colonial regime in 1963, Kenya's national authorities struggled with poverty and attempted to promote general education among its citizens. At the beginning of the 2010s, the governments committed to a set of initiatives for the advocacy of literacy and education. However, women were almost outside the scope of beneficence. Under the influence of the local cultural and social structure, Maasai women were still stuck in poverty and inequality. Consequently, they have limited access to school learning but appeal to informal education to solve the gendered problem of social inequality.

Following the introduction of the political and socio-cultural background of the field where she worked, Takayanagi proceeds to discuss the outline and outcome of her research interviews with Maasai women. She successfully retrieves sufficient evidence from interviews with those women who undertook intense engagement with the advocacy of adult literacy by implementing informal learning initiatives. In other words, the practice of informal learning not only promotes women's literacy but also provides those female participants with opportunities to take part in the local public sphere. As shown in Takayanagi's intense qualitative research on Maasai women in Kenya, informal learning is the major method for promoting their literacy and gaining their agency. Reflecting the significance of the disadvantaged social group's everyday practice of informal learning, Takayanagi contends that their development is intensely associated with the advance of their informal learning initiatives.

Culminating the discussion of Maasai women's encounters with gender discrimination and engagement in informal learning and global development, the last chapter shifts to the theoretical implication of her research. Takayanagi contends that her research 'supports Spivak's (1985) postcolonial feminist argument that subalterns can speak from where a space is

made available. Women in this study created a space to raise their voice comfortably without changing their identity or social class. They organised small-scale projects based on their needs' (p. 185).

Reviewing Takayanagi's inspiring and insightful discussion on Maasai women in Kenyan society, I contend that she successfully demonstrates the strong connection between (global) development and literacy in the Global South. Although Takayanagi does not directly take information literacy (IL) into account regarding the correlation between gender inequality, informal learning, and adult literacy, scholars in information studies could also take several significant lessons from her research on the enterprise of Maasai women in Kenya. In past and current scholarship regarding the acquisition and enhancement of IL, the informal manner of learning provided by library professionals and school teachers has been rarely discussed.

Perhaps owing to my Chinese background, reading Takayanagi's volume reminds me of a similar IL-related phenomenon in my home country. In the digital age, IL, especially knowledge of and proficiency in using information technology tools, should be considered as an important part of 'adult literacy' in the digital age. Nowadays, ordinary people in the Chinese countryside can conveniently and efficiently use mobile phones and the internet. The major factor underlying the enhancement of IL in rural China is not local authorities, educational institutions, or public libraries, but the proliferation of Alibaba-sponsored e-commerce in the past decade. In this case, the profit-motivated popularized use of the (mobile) internet represents another format of 'informal learning.' Despite the geographical distance and cultural difference between Maasai women and Chinese villagers, they cumulatively demonstrate the potential of informal learning in advocating adult (information) literacy in a non-Western cultural and social context.

Overall, Takayanagi's examination of the significant role women could play in advocating education literacy and the development of the local community in contemporary African society may soon inspire information scholars to notice some forgotten issues and groups within their domain.