Classification from the margins:

three alternative classification systems, 1930-1975

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Overview

01  Background
02  Dorothy Porter Wesley
03  Alfred Kaiming Chui
04  A. Brian Deer
Background

Classification systems are biased

Librarians, as they are known to do, found solutions
Dorothy Burnett Porter Wesley

Librarian, curator, archivist, and bibliographer

Moorland Foundation, Howard University, 1930-1973

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In the Dewey Decimal System they had number 326 -- that meant slavery -- and they had one other number [...] that meant colonization.

Every book, whether it was a book of poems by James Weldon Johnson, who everybody knew was a Black poet, went under 325. And that was stupid to me.

Why not take the whole Dewey Decimal System and put a book by James Weldon Johnson, the poet, under the number for poetry? You see? So that's what I did.

Solution

Restructure classification

Subject first, author second hierarchy

• Art
• Anthropology
• Communications
• Demography
• Economics
• Education
• Geography
• History
• Health
• International relations

• Linguistics
• Literature
• Medicine
• Music
• Political Science
• Sociology
• Sports
• Religion
Alfred Kaiming Chiu
(裘開明)

Librarian and bibliographer

Harvard-Yenching Institute, Harvard University

Photograph source: Columbia University Chinese Students & Scholars Association, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons
It was a period of transition during which three trends were dominant. The first was to cling tenaciously to the old sì kù (fourfold) classification of the eighteenth century.

The second, diametrically opposed to it, was to abandon the old system completely and to adopt some Western scheme such as Dewey's.

The third was to divide old and new books into watertight compartments, using the sì kù scheme for the old and some modern system for the new.

Solution

Created a four digit classification system based on merging ideas from Dewey & modified sì kù methods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Category</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100-999</td>
<td>Chinese Classics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000-1999</td>
<td>Philosophy and Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-3999</td>
<td>Historical Sciences</td>
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<td>Social Sciences</td>
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<td>5000-5999</td>
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<td>6000-6999</td>
<td>Fine and Recreative Arts</td>
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<td>7000-7999</td>
<td>Natural Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td>8000-8999</td>
<td>Agriculture and Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>9000-9999</td>
<td>Generalia and Bibliography</td>
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</tbody>
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未
Tionerahtoken
Alec Brian Deer

LIBRARIAN, SCHOLAR, AND VIDEO STORE OWNER

National Indian Brotherhood, Ottawa

Lecturer, Concordia University, Montreal

Otiohkwa Video, Kahnawake
Solution

Build a system that focuses on the needs of Indigenous patrons and decentralizes European worldviews.

Created to be reorganized and customized.
Indians of North America
Tribes and cultures, A-Z -- Continued

BDC Classification
BDA  TSIMSHIAN
99.H15  Gosiute  TSIMSHIAN - COASTAL
BDE  GITXSAN
99.H2  Guale  NISGA'A
BDE  KWAKWAKA'WAKW
99.H23  Hackensack  NUU-CHAH-NULTH
BFG  NUXALK (Bella Coola)
99.H26  Haida  HEILTSUK (Bella Bella)
BH  Haisla  HEILTSUK (Bella Bella)
99.H28  Han
BDC Classification & Tribal Geography Map

Takeaways

One-size rarely fits all

Center patron experience

Amplify voices from their own communities


