

Hong Yi, Zhang Jin
School of Library and Information Science, Wuhan
University, PR China

The Dewey Decimal Classification in China

Yi, Hong, Jin, Zhang: The Dewey Decimal Classification in China.

Knowl.Org. 23(1996)No.4, p. 213-215, 14 refs.

In China, the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) is one of the most influential classifications. It had a great impact on the development of Chinese classification. A comparison between DDC and three representative Chinese classifications corresponding to ancient, modern and contemporary times, illustrate the influence of DDC on Chinese classifications. The celebration of the 120th anniversary of the DDC is a good time to review its introduction, application, development and impact in China.

(Authors)



Ms. Hong Yi (b.1963) graduated from the School of Library and Information Science, Wuhan University, M.S. 1987. She is now a faculty member (lecturer) at the school. Her research interests are Indexing Languages and Archives Management. She published 28 papers and 1 monograph. She is an ISKO member.



Mr. Zhang Jin (b.1959) graduated from the School of Library and Information Science, Wuhan University, M.S. 1986. He is an associate professor and associate chair of the Information Science Department at the school. His research interests focus on information retrieval, AI, information system interface design, and knowledge organization. He published 40 papers and 1 monograph.

1. Introduction

The Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) which was first published in 1876 is widely used in libraries around the world. It is available in 35 different language versions and is employed by 135 countries. DDC's numbers appear in the national bibliographies and machine-readable records of 12 countries. Since the DDC was introduced to China at the beginning of this century, it has played an important role in the development of Chinese classification. With DDC's celebrating its 120th birthday this year, it is a good time to survey its introduction, application, impact and development in China.

2. The introduction of the DDC in China

The DDC was introduced in China by Christian missionaries. In 1900, the library at the China Branch of the Asia Culture Association in Shanghai used the DDC in the fourth edition of its bibliography. However, it did not, at this time, attract people's attention. According to our research, Mr. Sung Mingxiang wrote the first article on the DDC in 1910 in the *Journal of Education*, his aim being to create a new classification system based on DDC (1).

After the Xinhai Revolution (1911), the DDC became popular in China. Shanghai's Saint John University Library, Wuchang's Boone University library, and Changsha's Yali University library etc. successively employed DDC to classify their books. Jinling University library, Qilu University library and Zhejiang State University library used DDC to classify their foreign books.

The introduction of DDC had historical roots. After the Opium War (1840-1842), modern librarianship in China developed rapidly; the western culture invasion resulted in more and more foreign books appearing in libraries in

China. Thus, the traditional Chinese classifications confronted two issues: 1) the traditional classification system based on the four categories of Chinese writings was inadequate to deal with books on western culture or foreign books generally; 2) the traditional Chinese classifications without notations could not be used to shelve books or to organize a bibliography (2). For this reason, the DDC was soon accepted by libraries in China.

3. The Adaptation of the DDC

Around 1919, the DDC was adapted to meet the needs of Chinese books and libraries so that it could be more widely applied in China. More than twenty decimal classifications modeled on the DDC were compiled, among them the *Bibliographic Decimal Classification Simulated DDC* by Mr. Shen Zhu-rong and Mr. Hu Qingsheng (1918), the *World Classification* by Mr. Du Dingyou (1922), the *Chinese Classification of Books* by Mr. Liu Guojun (1929) and the *Chinese Decimal Classification* by Mr. Pi Gaopin (1934). All these classifications, like the DDC, had ten main divisions and a hierarchical structure. But some modifications were made concerning the following aspects:

1) Both Chinese and foreign books were taken into consideration in creating the classes. Some classes of traditional classifications were added to the new classifications adapting them to both the traditional and the new culture.

2) Many classes for new subjects, new objects and new concepts were added. These new classes not found in the DDC reflect recent developments of modern science.

3) Some classifications reorganized the decimal system of notation. For example, Mr. Liu Guojun used three digit

numbers, Si Tingyong used the first eight places of the ten Heavenly stems to represent the eight main classes in his *National Qinghua University Library Classification*.

4. The Study of the DDC

The study of the DDC has been an important part of Chinese classification research. Most of the classification studies published in China included chapters or sections dealing with the DDC. The 20th edition of DDC was translated into Chinese. In addition, review papers relating to the DDC appeared in professional journals. Generally speaking, the studies of the DDC include mainly comprehensive reviews, current trends of DDC, comparative study between DDC and Chinese classifications, technical analysis and so on. However, comprehensive review and current trends of DDC dominate the study, among 30 papers on DDC investigated by the author, 21 of them were about DDC surveys and current trends (3 - 6).

Deeper studies of the DDC dealt with the usage of „0“ in the DDC (7), the application of the priority principle of the DDC (8) and characteristics of the *Table of Ethnic group, Race and Nationality* in the DDC (9), etc. The single comparative study dealt with the comparison between the structure, auxiliary tables and compiling techniques of the DDC and those of the *Classification for Chinese Libraries* (10), (11).

The above data shows that the deep study of the DDC is comparatively weak; important issues of the DDC were not touched on, e.g. such as the computerization of the DDC, the practical usage of the DDC, the adjustment and adaptation of old bibliographies following DDC's revision etc.

5. The Influence of DDC

Before the DDC was widely accepted in China, most Chinese classification schemes were made on the basis of a particular library collection. Thus, the schemes lacked independence, compatibility and availability. This restricted wide application and failed to reflect the rapid progress of modern science and social development. Furthermore, the compiling techniques were out of date; most of them did not have a notation system, which would have made the scheme structurally clearer and simpler, and easier to update.

The DDC's introduction and application in China marked a new epoch in Chinese classification development. It helped Chinese classification throw off the fetters of the ancient, feudal classification schemes and it accelerated the growth of modern Chinese classification theory. Under the influence of the DDC, new Chinese classification systems adopted scientific notations and advanced compiling techniques.

By comparing the DDC with three representative Chinese classifications, ancient, modern and contemporary, we can clearly recognize the concrete influences of the DDC on Chinese classifications. (See the table: Comparison of Classification Schemes)

Table: Comparison of Classification Schemes

Classification	DDC	BCFBL	CCB	CCL
	1876 ed.1 1989 ed.20	1793 ed.1 1795 ed.2	1929 ed.1 1936 ed.2	1975 ed.1 1990 ed.3
Basic classes	000 General 100 Philosophy 200 Religion 300 Social Sciences 400 Linguistics 500 Natural Sciences 600 Applied Sciences 700 Art 800 Literature 900 History and Geography	Confucian Classics History Philosophy Belles Letters	000 General 100 Philosophy 200 Religion 300 Natural Sciences 400 Applied Sciences 500 Social Sciences 600 History and Geography 800 Language and Literature 900 Art	A Marxism- Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought B Philosophy C Social Sciences N Natural Sciences Z Comprehensive Books
Notation System	pure notation with Arab numerals decimal hierarchical	none	the same as DDC	mixed notation with Latin characters and Arab numerals decimal hierarchical
Major Structure	a main table 7 common auxiliary tables an index a handbook	a main table	a main table 8 common auxiliary tables 2 special auxiliary tables	a main table 6 common auxiliary tables an index
Compiling Technique	double-table listing the usage of "0"		multiple listing offering reserved classes	double-table listing the usage of "0" coordinate numbering

In the Table, BCFBL, CCB and CCL stands for *Bibliographical Classification of the Four Branches of Literature*, *Chinese Classification of Books*, *Classification for Chinese Libraries* respectively.

From the table, a clear picture of the DDC's impact on the development of Chinese classifications is evident. The impact can be summarized under the following aspects:

- 1) The introduction of the DDC changed the traditional Chinese fundamental classification theory, shifting from a classification based on a library collection to that based on a scientific classification system. It marked a new phase of Chinese classification development.
- 2) The adoption of a scientific notation system in Chinese classifications made their structures more concise and reasonable.

- 3) Influenced by the DDC, Chinese classification became independent of a concrete library or bibliography, finding use in general libraries. It expanded their scope of usage.
- 4) The integrated structure of a main table, auxiliary tables and indexes like the DDC strengthened and perfected Chinese classification.
- 5) The scientific compiling technique of the DDC has been adopted by Chinese classifications.

6. Current Developments

6.1 As a typical hierarchical classification, the DDC has always tried to keep abreast with world changes. Now it is moving toward a faceted scheme. For example, DDC has continuously added and expanded auxiliary tables during its revisions. In DDC 20, there are 115 special auxiliary tables. The classes of its common auxiliary tables amount to 8318. Meanwhile, adding and expanding auxiliary tables is also the focal point of the revision work of the *Classification for Chinese Libraries*.

Twenty-two special auxiliary tables are added and its special auxiliary tables amount to 59 in the third edition of *Classification for Chinese Libraries*. In addition, the classes of its auxiliary tables are enriched, the class level is deepened and their function is enhanced. Thus the CCL is likewise moving toward a faceted approach (12).

6.2 In 1993, OCLC Forest Press published a CD-ROM version of DDC 20 named ELECTRONIC DEWEY. Afterwards, OCLC's Office of Research designed and programmed a successor of the Electronic Dewey, Dewey for Windows (DFW). The Electronic Dewey features advanced online search and windowing techniques, full-text indexing, a personal notepad, LC subject headings linked to DDC numbers and a database that includes all the latest DDC changes (13). In addition, some databases set up the retrievable field of DDC, use DDC and other classifications for reference to formulate the record-format of machine-readable classification data.

It is reported that DDC is accessible through Internet. The computerization of DDC shows the current trend of hierarchical classification. In China, the computerization of classification has remained in a research and experimental stage. Most of Chinese classifications have no machine-readable counterparts. DDC's experiences in this respect thus attract much attention.

6.3 The DDC is in cooperation with UDC and the *Bliss Bibliographic Classification* (BBC) to pursue unity of these classifications on the at least conceptual and structural levels. The Editorial Boards of the DDC and the UDC are in the early stages of negotiating the possibility of publishing a joint area table so that the DDC and the UDC would have one standard set of notations for the expression of countries (14). In China, the various classifications manifest as yet little cooperation in their compilation and

revision. But the importance of standardization and compatibility of classification is gradually coming to be recognized. The CCL begins to play the role of a national standard in the compilation and usage of Chinese classifications. Many classifications use the CCL for reference during compiling and revision. The unification of classification and thesaurus systems has made much progress. A concordant table of the CCL and the Chinese Thesaurus was published in 1994.

7. Conclusion

The DDC Edition 21 will come into the world in the summer of 1996. One of the reasons why the DDC has lasted 120 years is its continuous revision. The structure of the DDC has been constantly modified, new ideas were accepted, and new techniques absorbed, enabling the classification system to meet the needs of new situations and maintain vigorous vitality. Without doubt, the DDC will continue to have a strong impact on the development of Chinese classification. On the other hand, we believe that Chinese classification development could make a contribution to world classification theory and practices in the future.

References

- (1) Lu Zhongyue: The Introduction and Impact of Modern DDC. *Journal of Guizhou Library*, 1983, (2): 24-29.
- (2) Song Mingliang: The Review and Prospects of Foreign Classification Introduction. *Library and Information*, 1995, (1): 21-26
- (3) Dai Weiming: Recent Developments in DDC. *Library work and Research*, 1986, (1): 47-49.
- (4) Chen Zaisheng: The 20th Edition of DDC and others. *Journal of Library*, 1989, (6): 17-19.
- (5) Dai Weiming: Review on DDC20. *Forum of Library and Information*, 1990, (1): 18-21.
- (6) He Jiaxun: Criticism of DDC. *Journal of Library Science*, 1990, (3,4): 64-66.
- (7) Gao Zaiqi: Study on „0“ of DDC19. *Library of Shanxi*, 1988, (3): 1-4.
- (8) Yu Xuehua: Study on the „Priority“ of DDC19. *Journal of Library Science*, 1989, (4): 27
- (9) Huang Xiaoning: The Characteristics of Table of Ethnic Group, Race and Nationality of DDC. *Forum of Library and Information*, 1995, (1): 22-24.
- (10) Zhen Lian: A Comparative Study on the Standard Auxiliary Table of DDC20 with the Common Auxiliary Table of the Third Edition of CCL. *Forum of Library and Information*, 1992, (4): 20-25.
- (11) Chen Rong: A Comparative Study on DDC20 with the Auxiliary Table of Literature of CCL3. *Forum of Library and Information*, 1995, (2): 2-7.
- (12) Dewey Turns 120 and Goes High Tech. *Knowledge Organization*, 1993, (1): 56.
- (13) Hou Hangqing, Wang Rongshou: *The Handbook of Library Classification*. Beijing: Chinese Scientific and Technical Press, 1992.
- (14) McIlwaine: UDC Centenary: the Present State and Future Prospects. *Knowledge Organization*, 1995, (2): 64-69.

Prof. Hong Yi and Zhang Jin, School of Library and Information Science, Wuhan University, 430072 Wuhan, Hubei, P.R. China