

CHINA WEEKLY REVIEW. Who’s Who in China. (Shanghai, 1931).


Chinese Imperial Titles


Chinese Titles and Ranks


Chinese Place Names

PLAYFAIR, G. M. H. The Cities and Towns of China. (Hong Kong, 1879).

U.S. Board of Geographical Names.


CORRESPONDENCE

INDEXING A CLASSIFICATION SCHEME

Dear Mr. Mills,

In the documentation profession as elsewhere there are fashions. One of the present fashions is chain indexing, which you so clearly describe in your article in the autumn number of The Indexer. Reading this from the point of view of the layman I am moved to ask a few questions and to make a few comments.

On the assumption that this form of indexing were attached to a Comprehensive bibliography your suggestion on page 43 that the absence of an entry on Painting, Landscape 758.1 will not prevent the enquirer finding material at “Painting 750” seems to me to hold a fallacy. If there are two or three pages of entries under painting generally he will never move to 758.1. Why should he, since 751 “material and methods” will lead him to think he has passed to a new field? This is no doubt a weakness in Dewey but an index must allow for this.
On the same page you state that it is not misleading to index Landscape painting at 758.1 although there is no material in the bibliography at that number. But on page 46 (vii) you state the importance of an index containing what is present rather than what is not.

On page 45 you state that inconsistencies in the classification do not nullify the value of the index. I believe this is another fallacy. Your indexing entries on page 44 hop smoothly from France: Architecture 720.944 to French Art 709.44. In a real bibliography a number of entries here on Francophile, Frangipane, Frantic Readers, etc., will come between France and French. The poor reader, having got used to France: Architecture and not having France: Painting or France: Art, will assume there is nothing on these subjects, and unless France: Art is treated as a synonym of French Art, as on the top of page 45 (i), the reader will again be unhappy.

On page 47 you refer the enquirer from BC to the Bibliographic Classification. Surely these are synonyms and he should be referred straight away to the right pages, particularly as you allow the abbreviation BC within the other entries.

I can go on like this for a long while but I am sure you are seized of the points at issue. If you could put yourself in the state of mind of an unsophisticated (classification- and indexing-wise) reader I should value your comments on these points. I know that some form of economy must be practised in printed indexing as all possible combinations and permutations cannot be afforded. I still grope after a solution which requires less training of the user than does chain indexing. Is it, in your view, a hopeless quest?

Yours sincerely,

RUTH ARCHIBALD.

Dear Miss Archibald,

I will comment on your separate criticisms first, before attempting to answer your final question.

1. (Para. 2). An enquirer, wanting to know where the topic Landscape painting is located, and looking up Painting, and finding no direct reference there under the phrase Painting, Landscape, will surely do one of two things:

(i) Seeing that no divisions of the subject Painting are listed under Painting, he will reason that the direct form is the one chosen by the indexer. He will be right, and on looking up Landscape painting he will be given the precise answer straightaway;

(ii) Reflecting that Painting 750 is near enough to begin with, he will consult the classified sequence. We must assume that this is carefully guided and that prominently printed headings will announce Materials & Methods, Subjects of painting, Schools of painting, etc. Scanning these should not take more than
a few seconds; we also assume that further guides are inserted within each group should the number of entries warrant it—one for Landscape, for example. If, however, the illogicality of the order or the indifference of the guiding make this task too daunting, the chances are that he will decide to consult the direct form after all—and again he gets the number straightaway.

I think an important point here is that, while some of the approaches made by enquirers are rewarded only by indirect references (like Painting 750, when Painting, Landscape was in mind), there will always be a completely precise and direct reference under one form of the topic’s name. Moreover, this form is usually the one most likely to be consulted in the first place—e.g., Landscape painting rather than Painting, Landscape.

2. (Para. 3). An index entry Landscape painting 758.1 means that at this number, or its divisions, something on Landscape painting (not necessarily a general treatise) will be found. We do not make index entries like Art 700, 701, 702, 703 . . . 799, or even Art 700/799, because it is assumed that the enquirer realizes that a number implies its subsequent divisions. If an indexer thinks this too much to expect of the enquirer, he may, of course, index Art 700/799, and Landscape painting 758.101/09 (the Library of Congress index does something like this). But I do not think it is necessary. By analogy, an A/Z subject catalogue is not considered misleading if it uses a subject heading broader that the subject of the entries under it, which is very often the case in most dictionary catalogues.

3. (Para. 4). This mixes two different problems. Firstly, I agree that France: Architecture 720.944 and French art 709.44 disclose an unfortunate inconsistency. It could be remedied in three ways:

(a) By duplicating both forms; e.g., France: Art as well as French art. This would seriously enlarge the index.

(b) Always use the noun form (the one usually adhered to as far as possible). Some strong-minded indexers have advocated this (e.g., Marie Prevost). But France: Literature is an odd-looking entry and some reference from the adjectival form to the noun form would be necessary.

(c) Use adjectival forms only for subjects in Literature and Art and give a general reference under the noun form.

But this is not a problem raised by chain indexing as a method—it is common to all alphabetical indexing.

Secondly, I meant that inconsistencies in the classification do not nullify the value of the index in the sense of making it completely void. I did not mean that the value of the index was unaffected. The argument that the order of a classification does not matter so long as it is thoroughly indexed was long ago demolished by Bliss as the “subject index illusion”. The function of the index is to lead the reader into the classified sequence. The ability of the index to do
this does not seem to me to be affected by a poor order in the classification, although the value of the classification-plus-index service will, of course, be affected.

A simple example of how careful regard for keywords helps to make up for defective order is seen in the following:

Government: Administration 350
Government: Constitutional law 342
Government: Political science 320

The scattering of major aspects of political science reflected above is a notorious feature of the Decimal Classification; the term “Government” does not appear prominently in the schedules at 342 or 350 and not at all at 320. But the above index entries puts the enquirer on guard as to the search problem facing him.

4. (Para. 5). This is not a problem raised by chain indexing as such. Any alphabetical index can handle synonyms in one of two ways: by choosing one form and making see references from rejected ones; or, by using both forms and duplicating entries. Chain indexing generally prefers the latter, on the score that the system already requires a reader to consult an A/Z index before he can locate a topic in the classified sequence, and that further demands on his patience should be reduced to a minimum. But when the resulting duplication would be extremely serious (e.g., repeating all the dozens of different aspects following “Great Britain” in the index under United Kingdom, England, Britain, etc.) then one form is selected and references made to it from the others. This explains the use of see references from BC and Bibliographic Classification to Bliss. A fair amount of detailed information was given under the latter (shown on p. 48, but not, unfortunately, on p. 47), and its repetition, which would have been paralleled under the various names of the other schemes dealt with, would have seriously enlarged the index.

You ask if an indexing system which makes fewer demands on the user is likely to be developed, assuming that economies (not duplicating entries, etc.) are inevitable. I certainly do not see any candidates at present. The most famous of alphabetical indexes to a classification scheme—Dewey’s Relative Index—has operated for eighty-five years and with considerable success as far as can be judged. It has provided a great deal of detail economically only because it has observed on the whole the idea behind chain indexing—that of a fair division of labour between the classified sequence and the alphabetical index. Chain indexing merely rationalizes and brings complete consistency to the method (just as faceted classification streamlines and makes consistent various principles of classification construction seen fragmentarily in older systems).

The alphabetical index cannot be considered apart from the classified sequence to which it is the complement. The load on the former could be lessened if the latter were to take on more work; e.g., UDC users often duplicate entries in the
latter, thus reducing the number of distributed relatives—and consequently the number of entries necessary in the alphabetical index (whose function is to locate distributed relatives). Again, if some topics lack a clear name (which means they cannot be given the front position as index entries—they are “unsought”) they may yet be looked for as qualifiers of the containing subject; e.g., painting techniques will never be looked for under Techniques, but very likely under Painting. In such cases, a transposition in the alphabetical index, to give an array of such unsought terms as qualifiers of the main subject, might be considered; e.g.,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Painting: Composition</td>
<td>751.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painting: Equipment</td>
<td>751.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painting: Materials</td>
<td>751.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painting: Techniques</td>
<td>751.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But this suffers from the fact that it removes an element of predictability and consistency from the index; e.g., an enquirer looking under Painting for Painting, Landscape and finding only the entry Painting 750 immediately gets the impression that the various aspects of Painting must be indexed under the direct form. If he finds some aspects listed under Painting he may not realize this.

Yours sincerely,

J. Mills.

OBITUARIES

ALFRED T. H. TALBOT (1894-1960)

The sudden death of our Honorary Membership Secretary, Mr. A. T. H. Talbot, on 20th October, 1960, came as a profound shock to his many friends in the Society of Indexers, of which he was also Joint Honorary Auditor with Dr. Dickinson since its inception. Almost our entire membership constituted his friends, for he made a point of sitting down at intervals to write to members personal, chatty letters telling provincial members about our meetings, linking together those living in the same locality, and being friendly. This word admirably sums up Alfred Talbot as we knew him, courteous, helpful, efficient—but above all, friendly. This quality was so necessary in building up our young Society, and we owe him a profound debt of gratitude.

Alfred Talbot was born in Highbury, London, on 13th July, 1894, and was educated at the Dame Alice Owen’s School, Islington. In 1910 he entered the Civil Service but two years later went to the institution where he was to make his career—The Bank of Adelaide, London. With the coming of the First World War he joined the Royal Naval Division in early 1915, being discharged in 1919. He was severely wounded in Gallipoli. Back in the Bank he served in many departments but his bent was always for writing; hence for many years he was their Chief Correspondent, combining this later with the post of Information Officer. This brought him in contact with many customers of the Bank.