Decolonizing the Way Libraries Organize

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Abstract:

Knowledge organization systems (KOSs) are social constructs that represent the needs and knowledge of specific communities at specific times and places (Olsen, 1998; Svenonius, 2000; Hunter, 2009). Libraries use knowledge organization systems like cataloging codes, classification schemes, and languages of aboutness to describe the information objects they hold. These structures are central to library cataloging (Farnel, 2017). Because library KOSs reflect the biases of the time periods and places they were created, applications of these systems outside of those contexts are potentially problematic in terms of gender, culture, and ethnic exclusion (Olsen, 1998; Alemu & Stevens, 2015). Many of the systems used in libraries throughout the world originated in the United States or Europe. It is time to consider the impact that these systems have outside of their designated contexts and how to integrate other perspectives.

The purpose of this paper is to question the cultural suitability of the systems and procedures libraries have in place to organize materials. As stated by Berman, the systems and approaches that catalogers adhere to are "so slavish" (Berman & Gross, 2017). When librarians talk about changes to codes and standards that are currently in use, it is often at the micro-level. These micro-level changes include submitting a term addition or term change request to the Library of Congress Subject Headings; or adding/revising a rule to Resource Description and Access. What may be needed are not these micro-level changes, but changes at the macro-level. Librarians need to feel empowered to go beyond the Euro-American models of library cataloging work, without feeling that they are violating the integrity of their relationships with networks and consortia. Structures need to be in place to allow libraries and catalogers to vary the way they apply the necessary guidelines. Specific examples—with an emphasis on Southeast Asia -- is presented to argue these points.

Introduction

The April 2018 issue of *National Geographic* acknowledges decades of racist coverage and cites the colonial world view, quoting John Edwin Mason, "National Geographic comes into existence at the height of colonialism [first published in 1888], and the world was divided into colonizers and the colonized". (Goldberg, 2018). Over the last few decades, psychology has started acknowledging that "many psychological phenomena are shaped by the culture we live in" and the Euro-American historical development of the psychology field means traditional views of human behavior are not as universal as originally thought (Geeraert 2018). These two examples question the appropriateness of supposedly universal systems or representations developed in the late 19th century in Euro-American contexts.

Knowledge organization systems (KOS) are social constructs that represent the needs and knowledge of specific communities (Olsen, 1998; Svenonius, 2000; Hunter, 2002; Briet, 1951/2006). Libraries use knowledge organization systems like cataloging codes, classification schemes, and languages of aboutness for vocabulary control and metadata creation for inclusion in library catalogs (Farnel, 2017). Many of the rules currently used in libraries today were created for Euro-American contexts. Knowing that library KOSs reflect the bias of the time period and place they were created means that the applications of these systems outside of those contexts are potentially problematic in terms of gender, culture, and ethnic exclusion (Olsen, 1998; Alemu & Stevens, 2015).

The concept of "decolonizing the catalog" is not new (Kwasnik & Rubin, 2003; Rosenbaum, 2015; Buckland, 2017). While peoples and cultures in Europe, North America, and primarily white descendants of former British colonies are culturally represented more accurately in these systems, the voices of cultures based in developing countries (Mansor & Ramdzan, 2014) and most Indigenous populations (Lilley, 2015), are not. The intentions of the creators, maintainers, and librarians implementing these current systems are not to exclude, but to describe and create access to materials. Unfortunately, due to the inherent biases of KOSs, certain users and cultural perspectives are left out.

The purpose of this paper is to question the suitability and cultural universality of current KOSs used in libraries worldwide, and is based on an observational and cultural study in Thailand. The paper begins by examining the relationships between libraries and culture. Next, a variety of knowledge frameworks are presented. The procedures section presents the paper's hypothesis for the study and the approaches used to test it. Findings from the study, with more explanation on aspects of Thai culture, are analyzed in comparison with what is presented in the Dewey Decimal Classification system. The paper concludes with recommendations on how librarians involved at all levels of KOS creation and maintenance can help decolonize the way libraries are organized.

Libraries, Culture, Colonialism and Rules

Culturally the library serves many functions. First, the library is holder of cultural resources for use by a diverse public (Augst, 2001; Leckie & Buschman, 2007). Second, the library is a cultural institution, being categorized as a social construct similar to schools and governmental

agencies (Leckie & Buschman, 2007). Third, the library is also a concept of cultural space having symbolic as well as intellectual meaning (Leckie & Buschman, 2007; Mak, 2007). The symbolism found in the third theme is what library users interact with when they walk into a library space. Materials are prearranged in a way that implies that the whole world view is being represented. If that representation does not make sense because it shows the view of a culture other than the local one, then libraries are not serving patrons in the best way possible.

Colonialism is a consequence of imperialism, and inherent in colonialism is a sense that "certain territories and people require and beseech domination, as well as forms of knowledge affiliated with domination" (Said, 1993, p9). Thaman (2003), a researcher in Pacific studies and a Tonga poet, points out that colonialism is not only a historical and political phenomena, but has had an impact on the way people think. She argues that, "little attention has been focused on its [colonialism's] impact on people's minds, particularly on their way of knowing, their views of who and what they are, and what they consider worthwhile to teach and to learn" (Thaman, 2003 p. 2). If this is true for education, the same impact can be extended to the library environment.

Some Non-Western Views of Knowledge
In developing countries and Indigenous communities, libraries are continually having to modify and adapt KOSs to fit into cultural and institutional settings that were not originally envisioned as potential use cases. One example of this is Indigenous knowledge organization, which is not represented in popular library KOSs like the Dewey Decimal Classification system (DDC) or the Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH). Western knowledge representation and Indigenous knowledge are often presented as a dichotomy (Thaman, 2003; Lilley, 2015; Sandy & Bossaller, 2017). Based on Burgess's (2015) work on cognitive justice, Sandy and Bossaller (2017) argue,

> that librarianship has been complicit, if not responsible for perpetuating colonial approaches to knowledge by replacing traditional knowledge with Western knowledge, especially in physical libraries established under colonial regimes, by failing to maintain the authority of the [I]ndigenous people who produced the knowledge, or by stealing or appropriating the knowledge without appropriate compensation. (p. 132)

Sandy and Bossaller (2017) present the 'either/or scenario' of folk/traditional/Indigenous knowledge as opposed to Western/positivist knowledge. This model emphasizes how Western KOSs, typically based on literary warrant (aka published work), do not meet the needs of non-Western societies and library patrons. What is left out of this model is the spectrum that may be in-between Western compared to Indigenous. Many Southeast Asian countries, like Thailand, exist in a space that extends beyond this binary.

Cultural studies calls this binary the "West and Rest" paradigm (Hall 1996). Following this interpretation, Iwabuchi (2010) identifies a "bipartite domination" where culture and products are transported one way from the West to the rest of the world. In this situation the rest is all other non-Western countries that exist on the periphery while the West is the center. The West and Rest framework is seen as no longer relevant. Iwabuchi suggests that Western theories should not be rejected outright, but that there should be no "uncritical one-way applications of 'western theories'" onto non-western contexts" (Iwabuchi, 2014, p.45). He suggests instead that western societies need to work to understand non-western regions and experiences before developing theories that are supposed to be used globally (Iwabuchi 2014). That way theories and approaches are not presented as dichotomies: Western vs. anything not Western.

Another approach is glocalization, a transdisciplinary model that has already been used in library environments to examine Chinese continuing resources (Iwabuchi 2010, Cheng 2017). The glocalization model looks at the interaction between globalization and local cultures, specifically how international products are used in local communities. In this model, diversity and standardization are constantly at play as, "the world is becoming more diverse through standardization, and more standardized through diversification" (Iwabuchi, 2010, pp 410). As a model for analyzing KOSs, Cheng found that, "glocalization brings unexpected challenges to a library's cataloging service, so that many technical procedures had to be revised or redesigned" (2017, p.3). Ultimately, the conclusion from this study was that flexibility and adaptability was essential to successfully catalog specialized materials in non-English languages.

Procedures

The hypothesis of this paper is that current, traditional Knowledge Organization Systems used in libraries are not appropriate for all cases. In this paper, Thailand and the Dewey Decimal Classification system are used as examples to test this hypothesis. Observational studies were conducted at three libraries in Bangkok during November 2017. The three libraries chosen for the observational study were the Lumpini Public Library, the National Library of Thailand, and Chulalongkorn University Central Library. Each represented a different type of library: Public, National, and Academic. Systematic data collection was achieved through use of a collection sheet, included as Appendix A, to guide the observational study in each setting. In addition, information about Thai culture and libraries was gathered from English language literature to give insight into what was observed at the three Thai libraries. The Dewey Decimal system was also examined, particularly in regards to how Thai language and religion are represented within the DDC class schedules.

Findings

Observational study results from the Lumpini Public Library, the National Library of Thailand, and Chulalongkorn University's Central Library found that all three libraries mainly collected and displayed materials in Thai, but also had a few resources in other languages. All three libraries used online catalogs and closer inspection of these showed the use of MARC format. Only Chulalongkorn University can be confirmed, based on this observational study, as having implemented Resource Description and Access (RDA) cataloging guidelines for some of their records. While the other libraries may have implemented RDA, the observation could not confirm such implementation. Based on observing library shelves at Lumpini Public Library, the National Library of Thailand, and Chulalongkorn University's Central Library, Dewey Decimal Classification system is utilized in all three libraries for non-fiction monographs. Other classification systems were employed for other collections in some instances, but due to space limitations, it is the Dewey-centered results that will be the focus of this discussion.

According to the OCLC Dewey Services website (n.d.) over 135 countries use the Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) system, including libraries in Thailand, and IFLA's recent survey of National Bibliographic Registers found that DDC is the most widely used classification scheme (Riva, 2017, p 26). DDC was created in 1876 by Melville Dewey in the United States and now is published and maintained by the OCLC Online Computer Library Center. Currently DDC is in its 23rd edition having last been published in 2011 (Mitchell, 2011). The Foreword and Acknowledgement sections of the latest edition include a list of 19 Editorial Policy Committee (EPC) members and 19 major institutional contributors to DDC 23. All 19 members of the EPC are from either the United Kingdom or a country that was once

a British colony. A total of 12 of the 19 are based in the United States (Mitchell, 2011, p. xii). The Acknowledgement section lists 19 institutions as having contributed to the revisions in the current edition. Of these 19 institutions, one is from South America, one from the Middle East, one from Africa (but a former British colony), and two are from Asia (Mitchell, 2011, p. xv-xvi). Looking at the acknowledgement of individuals to specific proposed updates also shows major contributions from mainly Euro-American institutions. For example, DDC number 297 Islam (Historical periods: Hadith) lists three acknowledged individuals and all of them are from institutions in North America.   DDC number 960 Africa also lists three individuals, but all are from institutions based in the United States (Mitchell, 2011, p. xvi-xvii). While DDC is used as the example to point out the original and continued Euro-American bias, any of the current cataloging and KOS standards in libraries, like RDA (Ducheva & Pennington, 2017; Santos, 2017) or LCSH (Olsen 1998; Berman & Gross, 2017), could (and have been) be analyzed in the same way with similar results.

Thailand is the only country from Southeast Asia that was not formally colonized (McCargo, 2004), yet the representation of Thailand in the Dewey Decimal classification scheme is still presented in a Euro-American centric way.   This can be seen in two main areas, how DDC deals with religion and language. Religion is central to Thai culture and identity (McCargo, 2004).   Thailand is a Buddhist country and 95% of Thais practice that religion (Senasu & Singhapakdi, 2017). Buddhism and wats (temples) are important to Thai culture in both Thailand itself (Ahmed, S.M. Z., 2009) and immigrant cultures outside of Thailand (Sirikul & Dorner, 2016). For a country where a non-Euro-American religion central to every day life, a KOS like the Dewey Decimal Classification does not reflect that life accurately. To illustrate this, the DDC is discussed in regard to its representation of religion and language. The Dewey classification scheme is designed around multiples of 10.   The 10 main classes listed at the hundredths place. Each hundreds place is further subdivided at the tens and singles place. Figure 1 is the Dewey Decimal Classification system's subdivisions of 200 Religion at the tens and singles places.

Figure 1: DDC structural examples from 200 Religion

200 elaborated from tens position	290 elaborated from the singles position
200 Religion 210 Philosophy & theory of religion 220 Bible 230 Christianity 240 Christian moral & devotional theology 250 Christian orders & local church 260 Social and ecclesiastical theology 270 History, geography , biography of Christianity 280 Christian denominations & sects 290 Other Religions	290 Other religions 291 [Unassigned] 292 Greek & Roman religion 293 Germanic religion 294 Religions of Indic origin 295 Zoroastrianism 296 Judaism 297 Islam, Babism, & Bahai Faith 298 (Optional number) 299 Religions not provided for elsewhere

As seen in Figure 1, western views of the world are privileged in Dewey with all numbers 200 to 289 focusing on Christianity. Non-western religions are not even mentioned until 294. Buddhism is number 294.3 under Religions of Indic origin. Instructions under 290 also state that two options are available for libraries that want either to shorter the call number or give

preferred treatment to a specific religion. The instructions allow libraries to move a religion into 210 or 220, depending on the type of work. Figure 2 shows a record from Chulalongkorn University Central Library's catalog. This record shows that this academic Thai library continues to use the 294.3 number and has not given preferred treatment to Buddhism.

Figure 2: Text on Buddhism from Chulalongkorn University: Catalog Screenshot

Author	สมเด็จพระพุทธโฆษาจารย์ (ประยุทธ์ ปยุตฺโต), 2481-
Title	ลักษณะแห่งพระพุทธศาสนา = Characteristics of Buddhism / พระธรรมปิฎก (ป.อ.ปยุตฺโต) ; พงษ์ศรี เลขะวัฒนะ, แปล
Imprint	กรุงเทพฯ : วัดญาณเวศกวัน, 2558
Edition	พิมพ์ครั้งที่ 1

LOCATION	CALL #	STATUS
Central Library	294.3 พ331ล 2558	CHECK SHELVES
Central Library	294.3 พ331ล 2558 c.2	CHECK SHELVES
Education Library	294.3 พ1711ล 2558	CHECK SHELVES
Arts Library	BQ4034 พ171ล 2558	ON DISPLAY
Arts Library : Thai Studies Collection	ท BQ4034 พ171ล 2558	STAFF ONLY

Chulalinet's Book Delivery Request

Edit this record

Descript	73, 73 หน้า ; 21 ซม
Note	เนื้อเรื่องภาษาไทย มีภาคภาษาอังกฤษเทียบเคียง
Subject	พุทธศาสนา
	ธรรมะ
Alt Author	พงษ์ศรี เลขะวัฒนะ
Alt Title	Characteristics of Buddhism
ISBN	9786163828255 (ฉบับสองภาษา)

To understand the reasons why this academic library did not choose the preferred treatment option is an area for further research.

Language and the types of language used represents how a country views itself and the world. Of the three Thai libraries examined, all three collect materials mainly in standard Thai, but also have English language materials. Chulalongkorn University's Central Library also had some collections in Russian, while the National Library of Thailand had Japanese, Chinese, and Korean materials in accessible stacks. In all three locations the English and Thai non-fiction collections were classified using the Dewey Decimal system. The National Library also classified the Chinese collection, but no classification was observed for Japanese texts during the visit. Language in DDC, found in the 400s, and Literature, found in the 800s, are treated similarly to Religion in that European cultures are given all the numbers from x00 to x89, with "others" (i.e. non-Euro-American) being assigned numbers from x90 to x99.

Around 74 languages are spoken in Thailand with Standard Thai as de facto/official language and that of literacy, educational instruction, and the media (Kosonen, 2005). Kosonen (2008) argues that when Southeast Asian countries, like Thailand, use English that the country is showing the importance of concepts like globalization to the nation. The use of other Asian languages shows the importance of regionalism. Nationalism is manifested through the use of Standard Thai. Localisation is the use of other non-Standard Thai languages. In some cases, "some members of minority language communities feel that they have to make hard choices between the maintenance of their cultural and linguistic heritage (i.e. local literacy) versus upward mobility in the society (i.e. Standard Thai literacy, or in some cases English) (Kosonen, 2018, p. 185). Language is a key issue. For libraries, accommodating the need of a multicultural/lingual user is an important part of ensuring patrons can find what they need. OPACs or discovery layers provide access to bibliographic and other materials for patrons, and "[m]ulticultural information processing is related to a person's culture and languages; therefore, it is important to know whether there are differences among users who are from different countries or who speak different languages" (Wu, He, & Luo, 2012, p. 83). What is presented through the languages of Thailand is more than the dichotomy of Western vs. traditional knowledge seen in many knowledge models from Indigenous communities. The

idea of Standard or Central Thai being "official" is a third component to consider when dealing with KOSs.

While the three Thai libraries observed in this study function using the systems they have, it is of note that KOS/organization of information/cataloging is not included in the 2010-2019 Core competencies for information professionals in Thai academic libraries (Tanoloet &Tuamsuk, 2011). More research with practicing Thai catalogers and librarians is needed to determine how well Euro-American derived KOS tools function within the Thai library environment.

Recommendations

This study suggests that it is not just the tools that are the inherent problem, but the structures in which those tools, guidelines, and rules are implemented. In a recent interview, Berman calls the systems and approaches that catalogers adhere as "so slavish" (Berman & Gross, 2017). He goes on to explain,

> [a] lot of local libraries could be enhancing access to the resources in their collections if they would allow catalogers more latitude. I think it's because of what I have suggested is slavishness, and also this kind of mindless adherence to standards that every entry has to look like every other entry because somehow that's the professional ideal. I have no problem with standards like a subject heading system or a classification system. You have to have some base that you are working on, but deviations it seems to me are not only possible, but it has always seemed to me that they are absolutely essential if you are going to liberate a lot of your materials from the narrow access that they are confined to now, by virtue of too rigidly applying the present standards. And of course you work to try to expand the standards and change general practice too. (Berman & Gross, 2017 p.350)

What Berman is pointing out is that librarians tend to wait for the approval of larger institutions, governing bodies, or associations before making changes that could be beneficial to local users. IFLA's 2016 *State of International Cataloging Principles ICP* outlines 13 general principles that should direct the construction and development of cataloging codes (IFLA 2016). Of all the 13 principles listed two are given priority. First and most important is, "the convenience of the user" (IFLA, 2016, p 5). This is followed by interoperability. How frequently are librarians following the user principle before thinking about how their choices impact interoperability? Is it possible that librarians become so concerned over the rules related to consistency and interoperability that the user is unintentionally ignored?

Librarians need to feel empowered to go beyond the Euro-American models of library cataloging work, without feeling that they are violating the integrity of their relationships with networks and consortia. Suggestions on how to best implement these have been presented before. Sandy & Bossaller (2017) suggest that no limits should be assigned in the number of classification schemes used on a single item. Cheng (2017) recommends that rules and guidelines need to be more inclusive, general, and simpler. Structures should be in place to allow libraries and catalogers to vary the way they apply the necessary guidelines. The frameworks that catalogers currently work under are too restrictive.

When librarians talk about changes to codes and standards that are currently in use, it is often at the micro-level, for example, submitting a term addition or term change request to the Library of Congress or adding/revising an RDA guideline. What may be needed are changes at the macro-level. Even though all the various information organization resources do and can

still benefit from continuous improvement at the micro-level, instead of trying to revise already inherently colonial and biased systems, librarians should be creating new structures for implementing and adapting these systems.

The results from this study also suggest that truly international KOS programs should recruit advisory members from a variety of cultures and institutional types. As seen through DDC, when multiple countries have the same cultural underpinnings but are geographically distant from each other, difference of cultural opinion is not being expressed. This "internationalism" is geographic diversity only and not cultural diversity. Truly international projects and teams should recruit members from culturally diverse backgrounds and represent opinions beyond those established by National Libraries. Also, previously codes were translated from one language to another, and while translation and making sure everyone understands rules and guidelines in the language of their user community is an admirable goal, rules translated in language alone do not necessarily have cultural translation. Truly international KOS programs should not originate from just one cultural vantage point and then disseminate it to others, like the West to Rest model explored earlier. KOS programs need to be culturally international from beginning through revision.

Conclusion
The purpose of this paper is to provoke thoughts and questions through an observational and cultural study that shows the inherent bias and unsuitability of current library Knowledge Organization Systems for all cultures. By presenting a variety of frameworks that can be seen in contrast to the knowledge organization structures currently implemented in libraries, the colonial and Euro-American view of knowledge is seen as being only one of many options that could be used in practice.

Obviously it is much easier to criticize and critique than it is to build and create. Making new systems with an unbiased view is not an easy task. As librarians we know that our systems are imperfect and flawed, yet we often spend time waiting for other groups, like vendors or programmers to fix these issues instead of taking the initiative and doing it ourselves. The first step to creating truly international, non-colonial, and unbiased systems is to acknowledge that there are perspectives not currently represented in library KOSs. As a profession we need to stop pretending that geographical diversity always means cultural diversity. Second, librarians need to stop focusing so much on micro-level revisions and step back to think about macro-level change needs. Next, initiatives to incorporate other cultural viewpoints and voices need to be developed. Translations of our rules and guidelines will only take us so far as linguistic changes do not always reflect conceptual cultural differences. Finally, all cultures should be represented equally within the systems we create and the voice of librarians from the cultures themselves need to be present from creation through revision.

Acknowledgments

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Appendix A: Thai Library Observational Data Collection Sheet

1. Library Name

2. Visit date and time

3. Description of the library look/design
    General:

    Number of floors:

    What is on each floor:

    Types of materials available:

    Language(s) of materials:

Physical Organization

Classification and notation
1. What types of classification schemes are used on the books:

2. What types of classification schemes are used on other materials:

3. How long are the call numbers?

4. Any type of special formatting used on call numbers.

*Try to take a picture.

Online Catalog

Physical Catalog
1. Is a catalog available for use by the public?

2. What language options are available in the catalog?

3. Find a monograph record and send to self.

4. Find a serial record and send to self

Catalog Record
1. Is MARC format used?

2. What subject access is available?

3. Other interesting information about the records.