Cooperation and Centralization

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For the purpose of this discussion, cooperative and centralized cataloging will be limited to cataloging undertaken to serve the needs of several libraries. Centralization of cataloging within a single system of libraries, such as that of a university having a central and many departmental libraries, or a city library system that encompasses the public library, its branches, and perhaps libraries in the schools, will not be considered. Nor will the various cooperative projects that result in union catalogs or lists be taken into account unless they also produce entries capable of being incorporated directly into the catalogs of the receiving libraries, since otherwise these libraries still have to do their own cataloging, for all practical purposes.

Centralized and cooperative cataloging are often confused, partly because a cooperative project involving more than two libraries needs a central office to coordinate the work and distribute the product. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that centralized cataloging is that which is done by a single library or other agency for the use of a number of libraries. Cooperative cataloging is done in two or more libraries for the benefit of each participant and may be made available to others. Thus, the H. W. Wilson Company in New York, which prints catalog cards for sale to subscribers, is a centralized cataloging agency. The Library of Congress serves as a centralized cataloging agency by making the catalog cards that it prints for its own needs available to card subscribers. It also sponsors a cooperative program by inviting other libraries to contribute card copy for printing, by editing this copy so as to correlate it with other entries on Library of Congress cards, and by printing and distributing to subscribers the cooperatively produced cards.

There seems to be general agreement that centralized cataloging is to be preferred to cooperative cataloging for reasons of increased uniformity, more prompt availability of cards, and economy of operation.

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In the absence of a completely centralized system, however, cooperative cataloging plays an important supplementary role.

The primary requisite for any cooperative or centralized cataloging or classification is a high degree of uniformity in the participating libraries. Indeed, the maximum benefits can be obtained from centralization only when uniformity is complete and all individual preferences of librarians and their institutions are foregone. Likewise, in cooperative cataloging there must be an effort to contribute parts that will fit together in a standardized whole.

Economic and other pressures have forced librarians to look beyond their own institutions for help in providing bibliographic controls of their own collections. The waste that results from unnecessarily duplicated efforts when each library does its own cataloging has been widely recognized. At the same time, many closet doors have been opened to reveal skeletons in the form of uncataloged, uncontrolled “arrearages.”

The lack of qualified catalogers and the high degree of technical specialization needed in this field of library work have also been factors contributing to an increased willingness to accept a standardized system of cataloging and classification. Some librarians (fewer apparently in the United States than elsewhere) who formerly believed fervently in cataloging and classification tailored to their own particular institutions, have even come to agree that a ready-to-wear product may be preferable. Their inability to employ the subject specialists and catalogers with all the linguistic competence needed has made them look more critically at their homemade classification schemes and subject heading lists and forms of cataloging.

History and Present Status. The history of centralized cataloging reflects the increase in standardization in libraries, from the promising but unsuccessful proposals of the nineteenth century, before standardized cataloging rules, lists of subject headings, classification, or even card sizes had begun to be developed, to the system employed by the Folkesbibliotekernes bibliografiske Kontor (Bibliographical Office of Public Libraries) which was established in Denmark in 1939. This independent institution, governed by a board of representatives from the Library Association and the Ministry of Education, with the Director of Libraries as chairman, catalogs and classifies all the current Danish books that are thought to be of interest to the public libraries, as well as selected earlier titles included in booklists it prepares as selection lists for public libraries of certain sizes.¹ In 1950/51 it printed 692,355 and sold 657,250 cards to almost 500 subscribers.²
In Norway, centralized cataloging is combined with centralized buying on the part of the state-aided school and rural public libraries. Each book ordered by these libraries through the Folkeboksamlingenes Ekspedisjon is accompanied by one copy of its catalog card. Additional copies of the card may be purchased, and subscriptions are sold for the complete output. In addition, the Deichmanske Bibliothek in Oslo prints its catalog cards and makes them available, by subscription, to other libraries.

Printed catalog cards for the six to seven hundred most important Swedish imprints published each year have been available to Swedish libraries since 1933 through the cooperation of the Sveriges Allmänna Biblioteksföreningen and the Skolöverstyrelsen (Board of Education). Wider coverage and more prompt service were achieved through cooperation with Svensk Bokförteckning, which began in 1948. When the Bibliotekstjänst was established in Lund in 1951, this organization took over the work. Libraries may subscribe for the complete service or for individual sets of cards by title, and the supplying of book cards and pockets has been started. Of special importance is the fact that in Sweden all public libraries, practically all school libraries, and some special libraries use the same classification system, the Klassifikationssystem för Svenska Bibliotek. This scheme is used also in many bibliographies and booklists, and beginning with January 1953 has been adopted for the whole of the Swedish national bibliography, consisting of weekly, monthly, annual, and five-year catalogs. The list of subject headings published in 1948 by Sven-Ola Hellmér and the Swedish Library Association seems also to have been very generally accepted.

Cooperative cataloging in Germany that resulted in centrally distributed printed catalog cards began in 1909. At that time the Prussian State Library undertook to print cards from the type set up for the Titeldrucke, representing all acquisitions of the Prussian university libraries, which since 1898 had been under legal obligation to report such titles to the State Library. Subscriptions were accepted for the entire set only, and the cards were not generally used for cataloging purposes in the local libraries. A survey of ninety-one German and Austrian libraries in 1924 showed that only fourteen subscribed to the cards, and of these only twelve used them for catalog entries. Centralized cataloging was begun in 1921, with the printing of the entries from the Wöchentliches Verzeichnis on one side of the sheet for clipping and mounting on catalog cards. Beginning with January 1937 the entries from the Deutsche Nationalbibliographie were made available.
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on cards by the Deutsche Bücherei in cooperation with the Börsenverein der Deutschen Buchhändler.

Although the Soviet Union has made great progress in centralized cataloging since 1925, G. Firsov stated, in writing in 1948 on the organizational problems in this work in the U.S.S.R., that there was no coordination of the activities of the several cataloging agencies and no standardized bibliographic system. Consequently, the cards were being used primarily for bibliographic purposes other than for catalogs. This is borne out by the small number of copies of the cards being printed. In 1947 the Goskul'tprosvetizdat (State Publishing House for Culture and Education) was printing 2,500 copies of its cards for the public, i.e., the “mass,” libraries, the All-Union Book Chamber was printing 450 copies of its cards for research libraries, and the Leningrad Public Library was printing 60 copies of its cards.

Nevertheless, the extensive coverage of the catalog entries that are available makes the U.S.S.R. one of the leading countries in this field. In 1927 the State Central Book Chamber, now the All-Union Book Chamber, which is a legal depository for all publications appearing in the U.S.S.R., began to furnish cards for research libraries. For trade items its coverage was practically complete until 1950, when a selective policy was adopted to eliminate the most ephemeral materials; beginning with 1950 some non-Russian titles were added. Since 1950 or 1951 some periodical articles and book reviews have been included. The service of the Goskul'tprosvetizdat (taken over from the Bureau for Central Cataloging of the Main Committee for Political Education in the Russian Federated Republic, which started the service in 1925) is limited to titles of Russian books of interest to the mass libraries, and consists of the distribution of annotated catalog entries prepared by the Lenin Library in Moscow. The cards are sold only on a subscription plan providing one copy of each card printed; in 1950 the subscription was for 6,800 cards.

Centralized cataloging in China was initiated by the National Library of Peiping in January 1936, when it began to print and distribute catalog cards for Chinese books published after January 1912. Cards and distribution system were closely patterned after those of the Library of Congress. This undertaking would have resulted in something tantamount to a national bibliography of the Chinese Republic, as well as a complete centralized cataloging service, had circumstances been more favorable. Unfortunately the effects of the Sino-Japanese War, and the end of a subsidy from the Rockefeller Foundation that
had made the project possible, caused it to be discontinued after less than two years.\textsuperscript{13}

Although much wise and sympathetic discussion of centralized cataloging has taken place in England, the only agency to embark on the production of catalog cards as a centralized cataloging service has been Harrod’s Central Cataloguing Bureau, which was in operation from May 1949 to March 1952. The announcement of the inauguration of the service indicated the intention to catalog all new English trade publications and many American publications. Arrangements had been made with the publishers to supply all books well before publication, and cards were to be available through annual subscription or for individual titles.\textsuperscript{14}

Brazil has an outstanding centralized cataloging agency in its Serviço de Intercâmbio de Catalogação (S.I.C.), which was established in 1942. The cataloging is done cooperatively through the participation of many libraries, and the copy is edited by S.I.C. and printed by the Imprensa Nacional. Any library having books not covered by the printed cards may undertake to supply copy. Each cooperating library is furnished, gratis, fifteen copies of its own cards. The cards and the system for ordering them follow very closely those of the Library of Congress.\textsuperscript{15}

One of the most recent and most comprehensive services in the field of centralized cataloging is that inaugurated on July 1, 1949, by the library of the National Diet of Japan. The coverage was limited at first to titles published after July 1, 1949, but now, in addition, older books are being cataloged and the output reaches more than six hundred titles a month. Approximately fifty libraries in Japan are using the cards. Because of the availability of these cards, the cooperative cataloging of Japanese books in the United States excludes Japanese books published since July 1, 1949.\textsuperscript{16}

Another recently-established centralized cataloging service is offered by Fides Publishers of Montreal, which began in November 1951 to issue printed catalog cards for new French Canadian publications and selected titles appearing in France and Belgium. The idea was initiated by the Association Canadienne des Bibliothécaires de Langue Française, which continues to sponsor the program. Cards are printed in standard cataloging form, with classification numbers and subject headings, for forty-eight titles a month. They are for sale by annual subscription (either for one card for each title or for the several copies of each card needed for a dictionary catalog), by series, or by indi-
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vidual title. A list of the 576 titles printed from November 1951 to December 1952 indicates, in addition to the author, title, and card number, the list price of the publication. It also tells which volumes are by Canadian authors or are about Canada or are Canadian imprints, and supplies evaluations of the books in terms of importance for such audiences as adults, young people, children, and specialists.

In the United States, probably the best-developed central system is to be found in Georgia’s State Cataloging Service. It was begun in 1944 at the request of the Georgia Library Association, and is operated for public and school libraries by the State Department of Education, as a part of the state aid program. Libraries applying for the service receive “dictionary sets” of mimeographed cards for all books purchased from state funds for school and public libraries, unless an order, such as one for duplicates, is marked “no cds.” The cards are said to be sent promptly so that they will reach the libraries by the time the books are received.

On a national basis both the H. W. Wilson Company and the Library of Congress offer cataloging services that meet most of the needs of some libraries. Those of the former are very similar to those furnished in the Scandinavian countries; i.e., the coverage is limited to the current American trade publications most likely to be purchased by public and school libraries. The Library of Congress offers the most comprehensive service provided by any library or agency anywhere, since it makes available to subscribers copies of all of the catalog cards that it prints; these include the titles that it catalogs and those in other American libraries that are cataloged in the cooperative program. The Library’s own acquisitions represent a wide selection of the world’s literature received by purchase, gift, and exchange, and all titles deposited for copyright that are selected for the collections of the Library. Cards are printed for all titles cataloged if they are printed in the Roman, Cyrillic, Hebrew, Greek, or Gaelic alphabets or have a title page in one of these. In addition, cards are produced in Roman alphabet transliteration for books in the Indic vernaculars. They are printed also for motion pictures and filmstrips and for sound recordings. Plans for printing cards for books in Braille and other raised characters, and for collections of manuscripts, have been announced.

A special program of duplicating and distributing catalog cards for Chinese, Japanese, and Korean publications has been in operation since June 1949. Nine libraries, including the Library of Congress, share in the cooperative venture by supplying copies of their catalog
cards for materials in these languages; the cards are reproduced photographically without editing, and distributed by the Library of Congress. Each participating library subscribes to one card for each title, and may purchase additional copies for cataloging purposes. The small number of additional copies sold, however, indicates that little use is being made of the cards in the catalogs of the collaborating libraries. Presumably this is because the participating libraries have failed to agree on a standardized product. Differences in the choice and form of entry, in descriptive detail, and in format prevent the cards from being interchangeable. At the present time the project is being studied, and an attempt is being made, with the cooperation of the American Library Association and the Far Eastern Association, to re-establish it on a more satisfactory basis.

The above summary of successful centralized cataloging programs in many countries leads one to hope that even international centralization may some day be a reality. To the extent that language is not a barrier, some librarians are already thinking in international terms. The cataloging of motion pictures at the Library of Congress, for example, enjoys the cooperation of the Canadian Library Association, which coordinates the cataloging of motion pictures produced in Canada and supplies the cataloging data to the Library of Congress for printing in its film series. An article on planning for centralized cataloging in New Zealand, signed “Festina lente,” and published in 1943 in the New Zealand Libraries, contains the following thought-provoking question: “Will our new close contact with the United States, and the rapid strides which aviation has made, mean that LC cards come so quickly to New Zealand that instead of amalgamating past work into one common resultant we find ourselves providing a new discordant factor for the future?”

Looking Ahead in the United States. In spite of the broad scope of the card service of the Library of Congress, some libraries, particularly in the academic and special research group, are said not to be able to obtain printed cards for more than approximately 60 per cent of their acquisitions at the time they catalog their books. This is explained only in part by the fact that the Library of Congress is not able to catalog all of its acquisitions promptly. The most urgent cataloging problem in the United States is that of finding a way by which the Library of Congress can increase its coverage, so that all or nearly all of the titles received in other American libraries will have been cata-
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loged, and their printed cards made available, by the time the other libraries want them.

The most recent proposal that the Library of Congress inaugurate a program of centralized cataloging was made by Ralph Ellsworth in 1948. A Centralized Cataloging Service in the Library of Congress, according to his proposal, would do the cataloging of all books in American libraries so that catalog cards, "including identification entry, subject heading tracings, and classification number," would be available at approximately the same time books were acquired. Ellsworth's aim was that such cards should be supplied not only for new publications but for all books added by any library in the United States. This proposal stated the obligations that would have to be assumed by the Library of Congress and by the participating libraries if the plan were to be carried out. The sharing libraries would have to attempt to make full use of the bibliographic information supplied on the printed cards, foregoing adaptations in call numbers, subject headings, and description, as far as possible, and they would have to be willing to pay their fair part of the cost. The expenses could be shared, according to Ellsworth, by the contribution from each library of the "amount that would equal its own cost if it had to do the work itself, less an amount for an assumed efficiency in centralized operations, and less an amount to cover the cost of altering L.C. cards for local use," or by establishing an arbitrary figure for size and type of library. If libraries find this theory of pricing unacceptable, he says, "then all libraries should join in a campaign to persuade Congress to provide the money."

The obligation of the Library of Congress would be to see that printed cards were available promptly for all books acquired by itself and by participating libraries. To do this, Ellsworth would have the collaborating libraries send to L.C. a copy of each order slip sent out. This would serve both to notify the Library of Congress that it must also purchase that title, if cards were not already available, and as an order for cards. For books acquired locally through gift or exchange and for which no L.C. cards exist, the Library of Congress might "ask the originating library to send in a microfilm negative copy of title page and verso and table of contents—or even the book itself." Ellsworth adds that books received under the Farmington Plan, or under any arrangement for cooperative buying, could be received and processed at the Library of Congress and then sent to the purchasing library.

It is clear that Ellsworth had two objectives in mind: (1) the elimi-
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ination of duplicate effort in order to make the amount of money available nationally for cataloging provide catalog entries for all the books acquired by the libraries of the country, and (2) the solution of difficulties due to shortage of cataloging personnel.

Objectives of Centralized Cataloging. Taking this proposal as a starting point, we should consider all of the objectives that might be set up for a complete centralized cataloging service. There are six, of varying importance, that should be evaluated:

1. To avoid duplication of work.
2. To make the most effective use of the cataloging personnel in the country.
3. To reduce the cost of cataloging.
4. To increase the number of titles cataloged in the United States.
5. To promote the uniformity of cataloging and catalogs.
6. To raise the over-all level of the quality of cataloging.

If there is one thing on which all writers on the subject of cooperative or centralized cataloging agree, it is that a primary aim is the reduction if not the elimination of duplicate effort. Some believe that we should seek complete elimination of duplicate descriptive cataloging, classification, and assignment of subject headings. This would mean establishing the kind of central agency envisaged by Ellsworth—one actually to handle every publication or unpublished item any library in the country wished to have cataloged—and the attainment of uniformity in all parts of the bibliographical apparatus of the participating libraries. Others, perhaps more realistic, believe that the scope of the system should be limited, either to descriptive cataloging or to descriptive cataloging and the assignment of subject headings, or to materials that would otherwise be cataloged in a certain number of libraries. Some believe that it would not be worth while for a central agency to be involved when duplicate cataloging would otherwise be done by only two or three libraries. A difficulty they may not fully recognize is that of determining which titles could thus be left out, in view of the fact that most libraries are constantly adding to their collections publications of noncurrent imprints.

The scarcity of catalogers qualified for original cataloging that requires either subject or linguistic competence has long caused a problem for administrators, and is at the root of the second objective stated above. Obviously, if there is only one well-qualified cataloger in the country who knows Zulu and the total number of Zulu titles to be
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cataloged is not more than the number that one cataloger can handle, we shall have made the most effective use of our cataloging personnel only when we have set up a central system that results in this one person cataloging all of the Zulu materials. No research library has on its staff, or easily accessible for occasional consultation, all of the subject and language experts it requires to catalog and classify intelligently or economically all of its acquisitions, unless its scope is strictly limited by subject and language. On the other hand, in view of present supply and demand, even general libraries may not be able to afford cataloging personnel sufficiently expert for their needs. A central agency that could be depended upon to compensate for the lack of local personnel would justify giving this objective a high priority in the consideration of a system.

There are two schools of thought on whether centralized cataloging can be used to reduce costs, in view of the widely accepted fact that costs increase with the size of the collection cataloged. A person's conclusion may be based on many factors, including the following: (a) whether he is considering the over-all cost to the libraries of the country or only the local budget, (b) whether he believes that the same standards of cataloging are needed for his library as would have to be adopted by a central agency serving many libraries, (c) the size of that part of his collection not already covered by such services as those provided by the H. W. Wilson Company or the Library of Congress, (d) the extent to which the cataloging is so prompt that expensive temporary controls are unnecessary, (f) local wage scales, and (g) the actual cost of the catalog cards and of ordering them.

Centralized cataloging offers the possibility, by the reduction of wasteful duplication in cataloging the same titles in several or in many libraries, of increasing the total number of titles cataloged each year by libraries in the United States. Whether this could be realized would depend upon the extent to which the central agency was supported. Henry Thomas, of the British Museum, has this suggestion: "The duplication, and the wastage inevitable in a centralized scheme (on which its advocates are silent) might perhaps be justified, if the institutions supporting the scheme, instead of pocketing savings and shedding staff, were to devote both to some form of cooperative cataloging." 20 As long as most of our larger libraries have substantial collections of uncataloged materials or there is interest in the development of union catalogs that really reveal the resources of the country's li-
libraries, the objective of increasing the total number of titles cataloged should not be ignored.

Greater uniformity of cataloging and catalogs in libraries throughout the country, which would be one of the consequences of centralized cataloging, may not at first seem important enough to warrant inclusion in a list of objectives. When one considers, however, not only the convenience of the scholar or research worker who cannot limit himself to the resources of a single library, but the facilitation of the librarian's daily work through the use of bibliographical tools published by other libraries and, most important, the tremendous number of cooperative bibliographical projects constantly in progress in which two or more libraries are participating (union catalogs and lists, surveys of resources, exchange programs, joint acquisition programs, etc.), one realizes that increased uniformity would be worth seeking.

It should be assumed that the average product of a central agency, staffed more adequately with experts than is justifiable in a smaller cataloging establishment, would be of a higher quality than that obtainable in any other way. To the extent that librarians pride themselves on being members of a learned profession they will not want to lose sight of this attainment as an aim in centralized cataloging.

Local Problems. If these objectives seem so important that some way must be found to organize and support a strong centralized cataloging establishment, either in the Library of Congress or to supplement its cataloging, two matters of concern to the local libraries cannot be overlooked. The first is relatively simple, viz., the conversion of present systems of cataloging and classification into a national system, so that the product of the central agency could be used without substantial modification. This should be not too difficult because, although it is an expensive process, several libraries have actually carried out such transformations in recent years, justifying the expense on the grounds of future and permanent economies. The other local problem has not yet found a solution—that of maintaining a local catalog after a library has disposed of all of its expert catalogers. Anyone who has been responsible for the departmental library catalogs in a university library having a central cataloging department, or for the branch library catalogs in a public library system, knows that thorough knowledge of cataloging, on-the-spot, is necessary to maintain such catalogs in even the most carefully coordinated system. Recataloging and reclassification in the central agency caused by developments in a subject field or changes in names of authors, issuing bodies, or titles;
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the need for revision of subject headings and the addition or deletion of cross references; the effect on the structure of ramifying references when the last or only book listed under a given heading is withdrawn—these are a few of the complex problems that must be solved locally on a fairly high level of capacity in cataloging. It is doubtful whether the necessary competence could be maintained if all cataloging were done by a central agency, even if printed subject and name cross references were supplied by the central agency.

Centralized versus Cooperative Cataloging. It should be clear from the foregoing that the author considers cooperative cataloging a part of centralized cataloging as long as it is coordinated by a central agency and its product is distributed from a single point. There are, however, certain advantages in having the work originate as cooperative cataloging that should not be overlooked. These may be listed as follows:

1. The cataloging can be done without the expense, hazards, and delay of sending the books to the central agency.
2. Specialized subject and linguistic competence of scholars available as consultants to catalogers throughout the country, more extensive than could ever be available at a central point, can be used.
3. The major financial burden for the participating institutions is included in their salary budgets and thus to some extent more subject to local control.
4. More prompt and satisfactory cataloging can result from cooperative work on certain types of publications by getting them cataloged at their source of publication; e.g., state documents in the various state capitals, municipal documents in the issuing cities, doctoral dissertations in the libraries of institutions granting the degrees.
5. A wholesome, critical attitude toward the end product results only from the effort of many cataloging establishments in applying the same rules and following the same policies.
6. National understanding of the difficulties and complexities of cataloging would receive little nourishment if a central cataloging agency were to solve all the problems alone.

Conclusion. The advantages to be derived from a centralized cataloging service approximating complete and prompt coverage of the books that are duplicated in several or many libraries are unquestionable. Such service will be most satisfactory if it results from cataloging that originates in the central agency, supplemented by cooperative
cataloging that is coordinated and disseminated by the central agency. The central service should also cover the cataloging of all materials for which unusual linguistic, bibliographic, or subject competence is required. The extent to which local libraries can benefit from the central service will depend chiefly on local acceptance of the standardized product, but it is unlikely that centralization could ever result in the abolition of local cataloging departments.

References

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ADDITIONAL REFERENCES


