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NATIONAL PROGRAM FOR COORDINATED JAPANESE LIBRARY ACQUISITIONS OF MULTI-VOLUME SETS AND EXTERNAL USERS SERVICES

1996-1997 Project Report

The 1996-1997 NCC Multi-Volume Set Subcommittee was formally established in July 1996. Members are: Toshiyuki Aoki, Harvard-Yenching; Frederic Kotas, Cornell; Kevin Lin, Texas at Austin; Hideyuki Morimoto (Co-Chair), UC Berkeley; Mariko Tamano (Co-Chair), UCLA; and Stephen Vlastos, Iowa.

Because one of the co-chairs was scheduled to leave for Japan for an extended period at the beginning of January 1997, the application deadline for the 1996-1997 project was moved to November 27. The Subcommittee received a recommendation from last year's Subcommittee to include back issues of current serials in the scope of the project, but the Subcommittee could not reach agreement on this issue, and it was decided that the scope should remain the same as the previous year. The only changes for this year's project were (1) all components of each requested set must have been published by the time of application submission; (2) a 500 field note is to be included in all relevant bibliographic records entered in OCLC or RLIN stating that the title was acquired through NCC funding and will be lent free of charge locally and nationally; and (3) print-outs of bibliographic records for submission to the Subcommittee must be in full MARC format.

The application announcement, guidelines, and form were distributed through Eastlib, Asiadoc, NOTIS CJK, OCLC-CJK, ILIT-L, H-Japan, Emjnet, Nihongo, SSJ, and the Journal of East Asian Libraries. At the same time, these files were mounted on a Sun workstation server purchased through NCC funding and administered at the University of California, Berkeley, which also housed associated files of (1) a sample earlier successful project application with all identification information, such as the name of the applying institution and the librarian responsible for the application, masked; (2) a list of titles previously funded through the MVS project; (3) a list of titles previously rejected for MVS funding; and (4) the final report of the 1995-1996 project.

The Subcommittee received applications from 12 institutions requesting a total of 59 titles.

The set price, publication status, and availability of each requested set title (and, in the case of Yushodo microform publications, sales history in the United States) were obtained from the project's Tokyo agent, Japan Publications Trading Company (JPTC). At the same time, availability of each requested title at U.S. libraries, and, for back issues of serials, the publication status (ceased or current) of each title, were checked to assign a ranking for each criterion, a "0" for within guidelines and "-999" for out of scope.

Each of the six members of the Subcommittee independently rated each requested title on the following points: (1) whether or not the title was a core title or non-Japanese studies title (scores of "0" for within scope and "-999" for out of scope were assigned); (2) whether the application assured matching funds, prompt ordering/cataloging, and free interlibrary loan of the title if funded (scores "0" and "-999" were assigned depending on assurance given or not); (3) the title merit (scores "0" to "5", with "5" being highest); and (4) the institution merit (scores "0" to "5",...
with "5" being highest). To avoid conflict of interest, members abstained from rating applications submitted by their own institutions.

In addition, in the case of institutions that had received MVS funding in the fiscal year 1995-1996, each institution’s cataloging delay was entered in a master spreadsheet form, with "-1" per one day of cataloging delay per title beyond June 30, 1996. Upon receipt of confirmation from JPTC, the requested title or the volumes of a set were entered in the spreadsheet with the score of "0" for those published before 1994, "-1" for those completed in 1994, "-2" for those completed in 1995, and "-3" for those completed in 1996.

These component data were entered in a master spreadsheet work form. Aggregate scores for the four criteria individually scored by the six Subcommittee members were computed (abstaining did not have either a negative or positive effect). For each title, all submitted scores were added and then divided by the number of members contributing scores, then multiplied by six. This technique resulted in the arithmetic mean score of each title. These were then added to other objective criteria collected by one of the Co-chairs to compute the composite score for each requested title.

The resulting list was sorted and reviewed by each of the six members of the Subcommittee, who agreed to place more emphasis on publication age. Thus, the second iteration of compilation assigned a heavier weight to that factor.

In the end, the Subcommittee chose 21 titles requested by eight institutions for NCC funding. Approval of this MVS Subcommittee decision was sought from NCC. Upon confirmation by the NCC Chair of NCC endorsement, the decision was communicated to the project’s Tokyo agent and every applicant institution. A note from the Tokyo agent received on March 3, 1997 indicated that all associated orders had been placed with JPTC. Gift plates for affixing to each item were mailed to each institution. The funding requirements were repeated in letters notifying institutions of titles awarded, specifying: (1) matching funds of 25 per cent of the set price, not to include consumption tax or shipping/handling charges; (2) prompt cataloging upon receipt; (3) a 500 field note added to each catalog record specifying funding of the title and free ILL privileges; and (4) free lending of materials locally and nationally.

A JPTC letter dated April 10, 1997 to the NCC Director confirmed completion of all shipments of 1996-1997 NCC MVS funded titles to recipient libraries.

Possible Guideline Changes for Future Projects

More than five years have passed since the inception of the Multi-Volume Set project. Although some changes were made during these years to MVS guidelines and other revisions were suggested, this fiscal year various points that call for revisiting some basic premises in order to maintain the relevance of the project in face of a limited budget surfaced in the course of the decision-making process. These are discussed below.

First, the recurring issue of the scope of the project in terms of serial back issue reprints needs to
receive careful consideration. At its inception, the MVS project completely excluded from its scope back issue reprints of serial publications. It later added to its project scope back issue reprints of ceased serial titles. Now that it has been determined that the focus of the AAU/ARL Japanese Journal Access Project will be on current, not back issues of serials, it seems appropriate to broaden the scope of the MVS project to include serials back issues regardless of the current publication status.

Another major point for consideration is related to the project guideline that those titles held or in the process of acquisition by three or more U.S. institutions should not be considered for funding. This should be reconsidered given the high cost of Japanese publications: we can no longer afford the luxury of three copies of expensive Japanese multi-volume sets in the United States. A decision will need to be made (1) to leave intact the current guideline allowing funding of titles not held by or in the process of acquisition at three or more U.S. institutions; (2) to change the guidelines to read that to be eligible, a title may not be held by or be in the process of acquisition by any U.S. institution; or (3) to change the guideline to read that no identical title shall be funded more than once through this NCC MVS mechanism.

Raising the price threshold was also proposed to the Subcommittee. The current stipulation is that a qualified set costing more than Y 100,000 is within the scope of the project. It was suggested that this minimum price be raised from Y 100,000 to Y 200,000, which would then allow funding of multi-volume set titles (including reprint back issues of current serial titles) truly out of reach of most libraries without NCC support.

The suggestion was made that out-of-print titles and non-Japanese imprints of Japanese studies titles be funded. In both of these cases, while significant titles not widely held should merit consideration for funding through the Multi-Volume Set project mechanism, for actual implementation, some adjustment would need to be made to present arrangements with the project’s Tokyo agent.

It was suggested that direct negotiation with publishers might result in discounts in acquiring sets. While this merits consideration to stretch the value of limited funds, again some adjustment would be needed with the arrangements with the Tokyo agent.

Some confusion arose pertaining to the participation of Canadian libraries in the project. While NCC encourages Canadian libraries to join NCC activities in general, since this specific MVS project has been funded solely by the Japan-United States Friendship Commission, NCC confirmed that, as long as this financial arrangement continues, the MVS project will be open only to institutions in the United States. It was nevertheless reported that NCC was “looking into possible sources of funding [for future MVS projects] from Canada.” (“NCC News,” 8:3 Spring 1997)

It was also suggested that some funds be set aside for titles in several significant subject areas. In a sense, this aspect, as one of the score components used to compute each composite score, is factored into the title merit score. Whether a further provision needs to be made for placing greater weight on this factor calls for discussion.
It was suggested that the larger the number of titles requested in a given field of study, perhaps the less were the odds of funding in that field. Women's history titles were cited as a case in point. While this year's title funding happened to work out in this way, whether it was with any intention on the Subcommittee's part is not clear. If this is demonstrated to be so, some remedial measures would need to be taken.

Last, but not least, the possibility of a price cap was suggested. Some requested titles, if funded, would have exhausted the budget. The possibility of excluding from consideration set titles costing over Y 2,000,000 was mentioned. It can be argued, however, that the project was instituted precisely for the purpose of making sure that significant multi-volume sets are available in the United States no matter how expensive they may be. The more expensive each set is, the less likely it is than an individual library will be able to acquire it without external financial help.

The 1996-1997 NCC Multi-Volume Set Subcommittee will monitor the cataloging status of funded titles from this fiscal year's project. As of April 21, 1997, the Subcommittee had received a print-out of the catalog record for one funded title from a recipient library. The Subcommittee strongly recommends that the Subcommittee for next fiscal year be formed without delay so that it may start considering the issues summarized above. The current Subcommittee also hopes that an increase of funds will be made available for future projects.

Hideyuki Morimoto (1996-1997 NCC Multivolume Set Subcommittee Co-Chair)