

The Cultural of Archives, Museums, and Libraries
Observation Study (option #2)
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The Korean Cultural Service Library

I made this observation on the Korean Cultural Service which is under the authority of the Korean Consulate General in New York from 1979. Its mission is to broaden understanding of Korea and Korea-U.S. relations through cultural and academic activities. It is located in 460 Park Ave., New York.

The Korean Cultural Service has sponsored and hosted many different types of activities, for example art exhibits, film screenings, and traditional Korean events, and festivals. For anyone who is interested in Korea and its culture, the Cultural Service has provided lectures. Also the Cultural Service has furnished information about Korea - U.S. relations upon request any information on Korea.

They have two facilities in the building, a library and a gallery. I visited the library on February 10, 2009, and interviewed with a librarian, Ms. Mee Kyung Kim. The opening hour of the library is from 9am to 5pm on Monday through Friday. Also it is closed on both Korean and American national holidays.

The Library

The library is open to the public and possesses books, periodicals, and audio-visual materials about Korea. Most resources are in Korean, but some are in English. Visitors can use computerized index to access to all book titles. There is no place to read and view the materials in the library, so the materials in the online databases should be checked out to use. If visitors wish to borrow the materials from the library, they need to register first with their IDs.

The General Regulations are like below.

1. A maximum of five audio-visual items (video, CD, DVD) can be checked out for one week and ten books may be checked out for two weeks per person. The fine for overdue items is 25 cents per day per item.
2. Renewals can be made once prior to the due date except videotapes and magazines. Certain titles already on hold will not be renewed. Borrowers wishing to renew the materials may do so by phone.
3. Borrowers may return materials by certified or registered mail. Overdue items received in the mail will be fined according to the date of postmark.
4. Periodicals, reserved, and reference materials may not be checked out.
5. Borrowers may place a hold on books already checked out. The library will notify the prospective borrower upon their return. The items on hold will be kept 10 days following notification. Certain titles with frequent circulation will not be placed on hold.

The librarian, Ms. Mee Kyung Kim said that the online registration is not available now and because in the general regulation some materials can not be borrowed, she and the staff decide whether the materials can be borrowed as visitors request. Generally the materials cannot be sent out by mail, but sometimes they send out the materials in special occasion like educational purpose.

According to the user studies that they have done, the requests for the materials are displayed in a variety of other areas. Mainly educational institutions ask some Korean-related materials. For example, a curator of an Art Museum requested the English and Korean version of the book about King Sejong who created the Korean alphabet and the Korean artist Hongdo Kim. A cataloger at a city library in Texas asked to help build a Korean collection, especially children's picture books. Also a cataloger at university library asked a donation of Korean books. Some Americans who go to Korea to teach English or travel in Korea request for the Korean information. Sometimes researches requested materials about Korean history and pictures of Korea.

Because this library is an affiliated facility of the Korean Consulate General, there has been a lot of requests from Koreans and Korean-Americans. The requests are mainly about the traditional Korean events. Some Korean-Americans asked whether the library could send materials to support their activities to introduce the Korean cultural events, especially about the Korean New Year's Day.

The librarian said that she and the staff have coped with the requests as much as they

could. If they have the requested materials, they sent them or asked to visit the library to pick them up. In case which they didn't have the materials, they have tried to contacted with the related organizations. If they feel the necessity of the materials, they purchase them or ask other organizations.

I felt that this institution is very special case and has its own mission different from other cultural institutions. They have a duty at a juncture of Korea-America relations and try to create a Korean-American cultural network with the library as the nexus.