Korean Grocery Stores at UIUC: Locating Korean-American Identity through the study of social spaces at UIUC

Brian Worrasangasilpa
AAS 450: Korean America
Primary Question

- How does UIUC and all of its institutions affect the creation of a Korean American identity?
Methods

- **Observations**
  - AM-KO Oriental Food & Gifts
  - Green Onion Oriental Deli & Market Organic Foods
  - Lee’s Oriental Food

- **Interviews**
  - “Rachel,” Korean American Adoptee, Junior in LAS
Observation of AM-KO Oriental Food & Gifts: February 12, 2007 (5:30 pm)

- Busiest of 3 stores with mostly white shoppers
- Largest variety of products available
- Korean Appliances and Cookware
- Korean Dramas and Advertisements
- Handwritten English translations
Observation of *Green Onion*: March 12, 2007 (6:30 pm)

- Modern
- Beethoven's “Moonlight” Sonata
- Mostly Korean shoppers
- Products similar to AM-KO, less variety
- Limited use of English
Checking Out
Interview with “Rachel”

BW: Do you ever go to like, uh, ethnic grocery stores like the ones we have on campus?

Rachel: Not on campus, no—and then mostly because I—I think a lot of it has to do with because I don’t feel like I’m a part of the Asian community on campus, because the Asians here don’t think I’m Asian—

BW: uh-huh

Rachel: but white people don’t think I’m white either. You know what I mean?

BW: yea, yea—

Rachel: So, assuming if go, if I went there people would see me and know that I’m Korean and they’ll be like “okay, know she’s cool, she belongs here, whatever,” but I like as soon I opened my mouth, and
Conclusions

- Grocery stores provide a means of reconnecting
  - Phone cards
  - Food
  - Language
  - Pop Culture
  - Shopping experience in general (recreation of Korea)
Conclusions

- Grocery stores also create separation
  - Alienates customers who cannot speak Korean
  - Implication that Korean Americans who cannot speak Korean do not belong
Next Steps

- More interviews with 1st, 1.5, and second generation Korean Americans as well as non-Korean Americans

- Exploring other spaces: Dorms? CFC? KSA?