Observation of Lee’s Oriental Food
Conducted on April 2, 2007 (2:00 pm)

If there was a scale for comparing Asian grocery stores on which Green Onion and AMKO occupied the two different ends of the spectrum, Lee’s Oriental Food would fall somewhere in between the two. Compared to Green Onion, Lee’s, size, products and customers present at the time my visit suggested that it also catered mostly to Koreans and Korean Americans. Like Green Onion, Lee’s was also rather small compared to AMKO and most of the products sold at Lee’s were Korean (both food and merchandise). However, while Green Onion featured at small proportion of Japanese and Thai products, Lee’s seemed almost devoid of non-Korean products altogether. Asides from the same two brands of Thai noodles offered at both AMKO and Green Onion, some Japanese beer and Budweiser were all of the non-Korean products that I could find. That aside, Lee’s, like Green Onion, also featured a deli. It’s customers at the time of my observation were also all Korean speakers (a middle aged couple, and an older gentleman).

Compared to AMKO, Lee’s Oriental Food’s atmosphere was very similar to what I would expect from a typical Asian grocery store like AMKO. Asides from having a very similar color scheme (dull white and beige floors and shelves) the overall feel including sounds and smell felt very similar to AMKO. In addition, posters along the front windows were also similar to those found at AMKO. All were in Korean and many advertised the Korean dramas available for rent in the northwest corner of the store.

General comparison of the three grocery stores also revealed commonalities. From which more questions/conclusions can be drawn. First, all three grocery stores, despite location and theme (modern versus traditional), sold Korean products including pots and pans, rice cookers and other appliances readily available at a much lower price in American stores. Second, all three stores possessed features and/or products unavailable at other Asian grocery stores: Lee’s featured Korean flip-flops and shoes, AMKO featured the widest selection of food products, and Green Onion featured an
ultramodern atmosphere as well as some Japanese pastry products unavailable at the other stores. Such similarity and difference bet yet another question—while all stores clearly cater to Korean Americans with the majority of their food and merchandise being Korean, who do their specialty features/items target? How does this targeting shape/segment the Korean/Asian American Community?

Figure 1: Lee’s Oriental Food