ABSTRACT

Inspired by Rick Bonus's book, *Locating Filipino Americans: Ethnicity & the Cultural Politics of Space*, my project attempts to “locate” a Korean American identity through the study of social spaces at UIUC. Work done on this project thus far has focused on Korean grocery stores including AM-KO Oriental Food & Gifts (First and Springfield) and Green Onion Oriental Deli & Market Organic Foods (S Neil Street). Through observation and interviews, I attempted to determine how these social spaces affect as well as reflect the idea of a Korean American identity. In moving forward with a summer/semester project, my space study will be extended to incorporate a university residence hall (Florida Avenue Residence Hall) as well.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Ever since I began taking Asian American Studies courses, I have been interested in the complexities associated with identity formation—I have been interested in the different ways in which we view ourselves and each other through differing lenses of race, culture, and gender. Given these interests, when it came to coming up with a preliminary research question regarding Korean America, I asked how UIUC and all of its institutions affects as well as reflects what it means to be a Korean American? As I dove into my research project using Korean grocery stores at UIUC as a starting point, I have since developed another important question since interviewing Rachel that additionally asks what role intraethnic conflict plays in shaping a Korean American identity at UIUC?

PROPOSED RESEARCH

Given these questions, my research plan calls for me to first and foremost, conduct more interviews with store owners and Korean shoppers including first and second generation Korean Americans as well as 1.5 generation Koreans before moving on to explore other ethnic spaces. While I was able argue that Korean grocery stores
serve as a means of reconnecting as well as reaffirming Korean ethnic identity through mechanisms including phone cards, products (food and non-food items), Korean pop culture, use of language (both spoken and written), as well as the overall atmosphere and shopping experience as a whole from simply judging from the landscape, my interview with Rachel revealed that these same mechanisms also serve as a means separation and denial to Koreans whose ties to Korea may not be as strong. In order to refine my argument and gain a better understanding of exactly how these spaces interact with the Korean American community as well as the University population as a whole, it is important for me to gain as many perspectives as possible.

From reading Stacey Lee’s “What’s in a Name? Asian American Identities at Academic High School” and Pyke and Deng’s piece “‘FOB’ and ‘Whitewashed’: Identity and Internalized Racism among Second Generation Asian Americans” it is clear that even within this seemingly small group in the US and even in Asian America, these exists many diverse subgroups within Korean America that not only separate and distinguish themselves but also practice internalized racism. As a student at UIUC, I have heard many of the terms including “FOB” and “Whitewashed” from Pyke and Deng’s piece used by students on this campus. While my initial research had never really considered finding intraethnic conflict in a space study of Korean grocery stores, interviewing Rachel really showed me that it is just as important to consider those whom these spaces exclude as well as include in my attempt to “locate” Korean America.

Falling in line with Rachel’s anecdotes about living at FAR her freshman year, the next step that I would take in conducting my space study once I had finished with the grocery stores would be to conduct a similar study using FAR as a social space. As Rachel and my classmates have informed me, FAR houses a fairly large and diverse population of Korean Americans. Conducting a space study using the same methods of observation as interviews would not only help me to see what subethnic groups are present but also how they interact with one another. While Stacy Lee identified four self-identified ethnic subgroups in her study of academic high including Korean-identified, Asian-identified, Asian new-wave identified, as well as Asian American-identified, it will be interesting to see how Korean Americans identify and differentiate themselves in FAR. Likewise, it will also be interesting to see how and why different Korean subethnic
groups separate themselves from one another in comparison to Pyke and Deng’s findings. Since Pyke and Deng cite Osajima’s study of Asian Americans at predominately white colleges to characterize one of their respondents, I expect that there should be some overlap in a study of FAR. Furthermore, a study of FAR would also do well as a space study because it will tell us how the University directly affects the Korean American identity.

In addition, Jamie Lew’s Asian Americans in Class may also provide insights into the experiences of some of the students I may encounter. Her work may also lead to future space studies of spaces of social wealth and support including churches like CFC and student groups like KSA. Jun Sun Park’s work on Korean pop culture may also apply to a space study of FAR, just as it helped me in identifying how food and dramas can be interrelated with search for identity and community. Her work will could be of great assistance in helping me to better understand 1.5 generation and yuhak-saeng living in FAR.
WORKS CITED


