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Title: Shifting Identities: Fashion Choices as Social Capital for Korean Women in the United States

About the Author: Research Topics: Latino/a Studies; Culture Theory; Gender Theory; Cultural Analysis of Everyday Life; Political Economy; Tansnationalism; Race and Ethnicity; Anthropology of Work; Popular Culture.

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I am studying working class community formations in a variety of contexts, with special emphasis on gender, masculinity, ethnicity-race-nationalism, and health in the United States, especially among Latinos (specifically Mexican origin people) in the United States.

Keywords: race, neoliberalism, clothing, fashion, gender

Abstract: In this short study, we looked at the relationship between clothing and identity among female Korean student’s fashion at the University of Illinois. Our initial hypothesis was that neoliberal subjects are actively using clothing as a way to reach individual self-development of both Korean and U.S. universities. The greater goal was to explore how students attributed meaning to their fashion choices within particular social and political contexts. The questions asked were explored through: individual everyday discourse and practices through individual interviews, macro-level analysis of clothing through a range of advertisements from clothing brands, and observing students on campus.

Response Paper #1: Sergio Lemus Anthropology 499 Youth and Global Future: East Asia

Introduction to Neoliberalism


Phoenix, Ann. 2004. Neoliberalism and Masculinity: Racialisation and the Contradictions of Schooling and for 11-14 Year Olds. Youth and
The set of readings for the second week define and outline the consequences of neoliberalism. Lisa Duggan tells us that neoliberal logic has used the concept of democracy to justify the overarching policies that for the most part benefit the rich of society. Specifically, Lisa Duggan argues that modern day neoliberalism has been constructed through and along cultural and identity politics and this ideology “organizes material and political life in terms of race, gender, and sexuality as well as economy class and nationality, or ethnicity and religion.” (Duggan 3) Henry Giroux in a critical tone evaluate the consequences of neoliberal policies. Giroux mentions that citizenship has become a function of consumerism, but tells us that any struggle against neoliberalism must “address the discourse of political agency, civic education, and cultural politics” (Giroux 3) as part, as they continue, between democratization and global cultural politics.

On the other hand, but by implementing a micro scale analysis of masculinity among youth concludes that youth are constantly maneuvering and negotiating gender formations. Indeed, Phoenix argues that neoliberalism has created knowledge societies that make individuals free to choose and responsible for their own success, but more than anything for their failures. In other words, neoliberalism “has served to individualize learners by rendering them responsible for their learning” (227), thus, education is central in neoliberal logic.

The three authors indirectly discuss the main tenets of the now well developed concept of Antonio Gramsci, hegemony. The general message is that in order for the neoliberal logic to continue gaining ground through out the world (developed and underdeveloped), an ideological apparatus that justifies corporations to make profit across national borders has to be present.

At the theoretical level, there are two suggestions that I feel the authors fail to delineate and make explicit. One is the difference between neoliberalism and an ideological set of principles which directly affect areas such as politics and cultural representation. The second aspect that could be make clear is the differences between neoliberalism and capitalism. In other words, they fail to indicate at what instances we are discussing capitalism as a mode of production and neoliberalism as an ideological tool or cultural hegemony.

The authors agree that state should “get their hands” out of the market. But, it would be interesting to see what form does neoliberalism takes when there is an active state involvement in national economies where
the system of governing is not democratic. Further, we need to be clearer when we discuss the concept of democracy too. It is true, neoliberal policies often time strip away of any “social” meaning attached to the modern day concept of democracy to achieve desired means, I think that if we in class begin to discuss of many democracies or speak of democracy with adjectives, we can be clearer on what we begin when we discuss that amorphous concept.

Response Paper #2: Sergio Lemus Anthropology 499 AK

The Organizational Kid


I still remember the first time I saw a computer. I entered James H. Bowen High School in a mostly low-income African American and Latino neighborhood south of the city of Chicago. The year 1996, the computer: a Macintosh. In order to touch the computer, we had to have long sessions where the teacher told us the basic about this technology, from how to use the mouse, to open a word document. It was exiting to sit by in the privileged chair where the computer was placed. I still remember the first time I got into the internet. The teacher told us that we could obtain information just by typing an address in the “address bar” of course. It all sounded strange, exotic, far removed from everyday activities. It did not take long and the computer was left alone, not until we discover that we could play games on it, tetris to be exact. I told the story just to emphasize the rarity at that time of the now everydayness of computers. It is amazing to think of that first insertion of this technology and the tremendous role now plays in various processes such as globalization for example.

Within the context of the neoliberal logic, policies have been the motor for globalization processes to take place, emerge, and dominate national and global economies. One of the numerous consequences of globalization is that it has penetrated almost every nation in the world in one form or another. Noted is the case, for example of the off-shoring of jobs by US corporations. Of course, globalization is not experienced globally in the same measure by all nations, peoples, and communities but the waves affect many localities. Anthropology has done a good job in documenting how these global and national economic, social, and political shifts have affected individuals at the subjective level. For example, Joao Biehl (2005), in his work on social abandonment is Brazil
has well documented how the expansion of markets in biomedicine has gained ground in underdeveloped nations.

The other side of the coin (meaning the “developed” nations) is also affected too. Those in the developed nations are also affected by globalization processes and neoliberal market logic. This is the case of the “Organization Kid” subject that emerges at many American universities. David Brooks tell us that a there is a different generation of students emerging in the present era and takes Princeton’s students as their subjects of study. The new generation of students is one that has been reared in prosperous times. Technology has been with them since the time they were children, such that their lives often times revolve around computers. As David Brooks mentions, at Princeton University, “America's future elite work their laptops to the bone, rarely question authority, and happily accept their positions at the top of the heap as part of the natural order of life.” (Brooks paragraph one)

Student at this particular elite universities are on a different, distant plain of existence to put it in metaphysical terms from the rest of the population. Most of them are energetic, live a hectic life, are constantly self-improving, and are always trying to live the present in order to get to the future. A future that is often times promising to these students that represent the best of what American has to offer in terms of higher education.

Similarly, Katherine Boo offers us a picture of how markets are being transformed for the mere function of profit making. The article by Katherine documents the Americanization, in economic and to a lesser extend in cultural terms, of Chennai, India. This is the third largest city of India where many manufacturing companies are moving into and are making use of the cheap labor and almost no governmental restrictions. The owners of Office Tiger are those same Princeton graduates that Brooks talked to at that elite university.

While last week was spent discussing exactly what are neo-liberalist economic policies. This week, the readings offer a picture of who is this new generation of students, what they do, their morals, ideals, yearnings, and view about politics, life, and religion. Although I agree with the characterization of students at Princeton, I wonder what type of “kid” would emerge at the University of Illinois. We certainly have much more, but no sufficient, racial, ethnic and cultural diversity which would raise a number of different concerns.

The key points in the readings are as follows: higher education has become a “training” ground for professionals that could be inserted into
the capitalist machinery and able to function without questioning authority and the status quo. Also, global markets are transformative, transferable from one locality to another and transnational to the point that one day a company has its business in India and tomorrow that same company has moved to better markets. Although many applaud more increasing number of jobs that these companies generate, we see that long-term economic benefits for underdeveloped nations are not, and will not, be addressed unless there is a radical transformation of the neoliberal logic.

Lastly, it is interesting to note that the same instruments that have given rise to globalization such as the internet is in a limited sense serving to generate some type of political consciousness. For example, when the Chiapas rebellion against the Mexican government took place in early January of 1995. It did not pass a couple of hours when the same leaders of this social movement posted in the internet a letter which stated their claims and argument for the armed insurrection against the Mexican government. Thus, in light of modern technologies versatility, we are seeing how certain internet sites are being use as portal to upload any type of information in an unrestricted and uncensored manner. Youtube website is a good example. There, I was able to look up videos about social movements, political speeches, and alternative media not often available through the national media. There is some hope that, although the neoliberal logic seems at time overwhelming and difficult to fight against, there are openings in the iron wall where alternatives could be sought.

Reference cited


RESPONSE PAPER # 3

Sergio Lemus Anthropology 499AK February 4, 2008


Ong, Aihwa. 2006. Higher Learning in Global Space. In Neoliberalism as

A*Star (Singapore Agency for Science, Technology, and Research) Yearbook 2006/07 (to be handed out in class).

Govermentality and Risk Society: Youth caught up in the Middle

In discussions of globalization, youth have until recently appear as subjects of investigation (Phoenix 2004; Brooks 2001; Austin 2005 and Ong 2006). In this short essay, I will point to two theoretical frameworks that have been utilized to understand youth in the global space (Austin 2005). The global space can be said to be consisted of processes that are not nation-state bounded. Then, I will briefly discuss how education has become the central engine for the emergence of modes of subjectivation in modern China and to a lesser extend here in the United States too.

The two dominant theoretical frameworks that help us to think about youth and globalization are the governmentality and neoliberalism scholarship respectively Joe Austin (2005). The governmentality framework was initiated by Michel Foucault, which in the present, while maintaining its basic premises, there is a particular emphasis on analyzing "whether a risk regime or a “post-disciplinary” order has replaced the disciplinary order that Foucault described in Discipline and Punish (1977)” (Austin prgph. 6). Under the neoliberal framework, youth are seen as the ultimate “neoliberal subject," “free” to choose in a market based society, which derives their identity from a consumerist culture. However, if we introduce a governmentality framework to neoliberalism, we see that free choice becomes a disciplined and directed choice of what products to consume. Therefore, these two frameworks speak to each other while at the same time disagree on the levels of analysis. Having those bodies of theories in mind helps us open areas of inquiry that may assist us to understand the status of youth vis-à-vis globalization processes.

Youth have also been the target of nationalist ideology that mobilizes vast sectors of society for the sake of modernizing the nation. Educating citizens on proper nationalistic values has been and continues to be central to many nation-states. A close attention to globalization processes may indicate and offer us a glimpse of how the future may appear at the global scale. Aihwa Ong (2006), for example, comments that “in modern societies, education is a technology of power involved in the construction of modern ethic and knowledges, the beliefs, attitudes and skills that shape new kinds of knowledgeable subjects” (Ong 2006:
In other words, when education is not seen as a venue to mold the national citizen, there is a “shift from a national to transnational space for producing knowledgable subjects…from a focus on political and multicultural diversity at home to one of neoliberalism and borderless entrepreneurial subjects abroad” (Ong 2006: 140). By citing examples of US study abroad programs and analyzing the role that they occupy in the imagination of higher education administrators, Ong demonstrates how the desire to become “global” could potentially be detrimental for the nation-state.

The desire to become global in other parts of the globe has different consequences. Chinese youth are currently caught up in a field of forces and struggles of and for globalization. Chinese parents, in light of the one-child policy promoted by the state, have placed all their effort in preparing their child, at times, even before it is born for the challenges in life. Ana Anagnost (forthcoming) discusses how a child in China has become a sign of value. The desired child is one that “embodies a rugged self-sufficiency in the struggle for competitive advantage rather than selfless socialist citizens willing to sacrifice their youth for the nation” (Anagnost 1). Furthermore, by developing the innate qualities for children, Chinese parents “ensure family futures, while also contributing to the transcendence of the nation from a state of backwardness to one of global mastery” (Anagnost 2).

The authors above demonstrate that globalization continues to be a very powerful discourse at the nation-state level and in the global arena. The desire to become “global” can be located in the developed (modern) as well as in the underdeveloped (not yet modern) nations. Furthermore, desire for modernity (to be seen and become modern) has had numerous consequences for people. More importantly, the readings show us how families and individuals are affected by these global processes. Sending their child to a foreign (the desired destination the United States) has become very important and is the goal as well as the reward for the years invested in their child over the years.

One critique that may be posed is the way the scholarship has dealt with the questions of agency. Michel Foucault in History of Sexuality (1976) has already suggested that power is everywhere and could be located in every realm of society. The picture painted by scholars is one in which we have on one side, the forces of globalization, and on the other, individuals who are reacting against those forces but in a superficial level. None of the authors seem to signal whether there are sites of resistance or an awaken awareness of the consequences of modernity or modernizing national projects.
While it may appear that individual agency seems to dissipate as forces of globalization reach every part of the world, let us not assume that globalization processes are uniform and affects all people with the same intensity. I think that the authors force us to think more deeply of how one may react to forces that at time may seem overwhelming. We may think that going abroad may be seen a non-calculated act to globalization processes, but Chinese families by that very act could potentially create alternative consciousness that may contradict and resist globalization. Indeed, affecting how globalization operates at the nation-state, community and family level.

Response Paper #4: Sergio Lemus Anthropology 499 AK


South Korea, Neoliberalism and the State: Faulty Consumerism by Women and Youth

Buying things and spending, a hallmark of modern consumer culture, have often been attributed to women and youth in the United States and in other Western European nations. Laura C. Nelson (2006) writes about consumer culture in South Korea. According to Nelson, spending money “speaks volumes about cultural beliefs, history, social coherence, and personal values” (Nelson 2006:188). Specifically, in this chapter, Nelson tells us about a specific discourse of “responsible” consumer behavior in South Korea by “examining the ways in which the terms of this discourse shifted with changing local circumstances” (2006: 189). South Korean’s consumer practices, as Nelson contends, should be traced back to the colonial period when Japan colonized Korea between 1905 and 1910. Consumption was not a widespread practice, and for the most part, it was practiced by a small group of urban yangban. For Korean consumers, the colonial period served as an important “learning” phase where much of the elite population emulated Japanese-style goods and services. Then, from 1961 until 1993, South Korea had a series of authoritative generals such as General Park Chung-hce. Scarifying for the good of the nation was a monologue and the political goals of South Korea. Among them: “promotion of the public welfare, freedom from exploitation, the fair distribution of income amongst the people” (2006:192).

I agree with Laura Nelson when she suggests that South Korea’s economic development have been impossible to emerge without the cooperation of the citizen-consumer, yet appeals to frugal behavior
persist. Further, Nelson makes the statement that in South Korea, consumer is now synonymous with “citizen,” much as it is in the United States. Koreans are more and more self-conscious consumers, and South Korea’s economic miracle is based on its citizens’ thirst for the latest brand goods and services the market offers.

Within the neoliberal logic, the state has often been blamed for impeding modernization and economic progress. Contrary to that logic, in South Korea, the state has been the principal player in the implementation of neoliberal policies as well as fomenting a consumer citizenship for the sake of the nation and its development. The implementation, development, and fostering of a credit system for Korean citizens and its further support from the government are examples that show the active role of the state in national economies.

With the emerging market for credit and consumption in South Korea, women and youth were blamed for inappropriately using their credit, thus, not practicing frugality. The men and their consumption practices and habits, on the other hand, were rarely questioned within this "blaming" framework. It is interesting to note that pundits and scholars are easy to put blame on certain individuals in society, usually women and children, without considering that structural conditions that have given rise to those behavior patterns. Nelson does an excellent job on analyzing how certain economic policies have given rise to intensive consumer practices in South Korea. However, equating consumers with citizens, at least to me, strips away any agency from individuals to resist market forces (or the drive through advertisements to consume).

Overall, Laura C. Nelson points to certain economic consequence and patterns that have occurred when governments, for the sake of modernization or reaching “globalization,” have hold tight to neoliberal policies. There is an indication that consumer culture had its roots on the history of colonial Korea but that pattern can be maintained if you look at the urban classes only Modernization is process that involves all actors in a nation and citizens-as-consumers are not left out from this economic processes. However, those in power have blamed vulnerable individuals when things get out of hand. Indeed, certain populations are blamed for carrying out a faulty, inappropriate, self-indulged, consumerism when that behavior has been created from a faulty government that has believed in the magic of neoliberalism.

Response Paper #5:
sergio lemus Anthropology 499AK

Japan has often been seen as a model nation in terms of modernization in East Asia. Along with South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan and China, this region has become an important economic zone for globalize capital. In the process towards modernization, in the case of Japan, big economic, educational, social and cultural reforms have literally transformed everyday life of its citizens.

This week’s readings Arai (2001), Arai 2005 and Yoda discuss the “ugly” side of modernization. A side often glossed as unimportant or temporary. One area in which we can easily see how social relations have transformed is the relation between the State and the individual. In Andrea G Arai (2005) analyzes “how education reforms, defined by a new relationship between education, labor and nationalism, forecast a previously imagined rationalization of everyday life...[she] focus on the larges context of the reforms, and the discursive constructs of strengththening and an inner frontier” (Arai 2005, Paragraph 2). As argued by Arai on the strategic deployment of discourses, those are geared to transfer the burden of social risk, illnesses, and unemployment to individuals’ domains such as the “family.” Indirectly and in subtle ways, state discourses are tied to power and governmentality. What is particular appealing of this reading is the that Arai (2005) looks at those interlocking moments in which neoliberal logic and governmentality function together, although not in a harmonious and cohesive way, to create and inculcate a new subjectivity onto individuals in society. For Andrea G. Arai (2005), the goal is to create a reserve army of labor which is embodied by the fureeta or drifting worker.

A second macro analysis of Millenial Japan is provided by Tomiko Yoda (2006). The essay by Yoda points to “a significant degree of complicity between the Japanese neoliberals and neonationalist, despite their
apparent disagreements on their attitudes towards economic globalization and the role of the nation-states today” (2006: 16) Central to the argument proposed by Yoda is the place that Japan played in the 1990s as a nation-state in the global arena. While having a fairy tale narrative of modernization during the decades before the 1990s, Japanese intellectuals began questioning the place of Japan as a global nation. Part a reaction to globalization, neoliberal logic, and increasing social discomfort, Japanese citizens began looking for alternative understanding of how to be Japanese. According to Yoda, two incidents shook the nation that showed the “social fault lines running beneath the surface of the supposedly homogenous ‘mass middle stratum society’” (20): the Hanshin earthquake and the Aum Shinrikyo sarin gas attack in Tokyo subway, both in 1995. According to Yoda, many imagined Japan liberated from the telos of modernization, events such as those taken place in 1995 showed or rather, “obscured the disintegration of the national that was under way…The imaginary nation topos of Postmodern Japan, in turn, provided a pseudonational and spatial contour to the empty, endless present” (2006: 35).

One of those fault lines were clearly shown when a child becomes the object embodying modernization’s decay: Shonen A. According to Arai (2001), she said that in the 1990s, “the child” and its deployment became the site of newly intensified nexus of social anxiety. Taking this emergent discourse around family, child, and proper roles, Arai examines “the production of these images of ‘the child’ and the concerted body of associations about nature, culture, and history, particular to this moment in Japan that they evoke” (2001: 841). In this article, Arai begins by focusing on analyzing the Miyaki Hayao film Monohehime, focusing on the character Sam, a spirit of unknown origins from ancient Japan. She then moves to Shonen A jiken, an incident that took place in Kobe, Japan. She analyzes this incident by engaging with the seminal piece of writing written by the father of the child. The goal of Arai in this article is simple, "to reconnect the spheres of the private and the politico historical that the production of monstrosity in this memoir estranges, in order to engage with the stark social reality of children and their families in late-twentieth-century Japan" (844). While Andrea G. Arai recounts details of the event which lead to a deep questioning of who the Japanese were as a nation, I cannot help but to remember what has taken place in other parts of the world where violence has reached university campuses, and spheres of society that have previously not been associated with violence.

A question which may be dangerously if certain groups in power hear it is this: Is Neoliberalism transforming subjectivities to deeper levels we are currently unable to admit that the “sporadic” acts of violence by
subjects is just the tip of the iceberg or the end result of that logic? I have not an answer to this question. The authors are hinting that something radically different is taking place, what is that, they seem to allude to it at this moment.

Response Paper #6:

Sergio Lemus

Anthropology 499AK


Higher Education, Youth and Neoliberal Subject-hood in South Korea

The articles for this week discuss how neoliberalism has found its nest in higher higher education in South Korea, work and youth culture. This is not a surprise, of course, similar processes are currently occurring all around the world. However, the case of South Korea illustrates the specific formation that neoliberal governmentality has acquired historically within the past decades. As argued by Jung-ah Choi (2005), since the 1990s, there has been a significant change in the discourse of education around social and cultural arenas. As commented, during the 1990s, the state has transformed centralized state education towards a “governmental policy of neoliberalism coupled with the swirl of consumerism” (269). In other words, education has slowly become a privatized enterprise, and as a result, “students are claiming freedom and autonomy for themselves, rejecting authority that teachers once had” (270). This rejection of authority could be placed as a reaction to traditional values of South Korean society or the simple approach as just another generation representing different concept of authority, work and values.

Nevertheless, at a macro level, as argued by Jung-ha Choi, through ethnographic fieldwork among low-income youths, neoliberal discourses are negotiated and transformed by this specific youth population. His analysis speaks the
“ideological pitfall of neoliberalism, echoing critical scholars’ thesis that neoliberalistic education with free market principles perpetuated and broadened existing inequalities” (269). In this analysis, we encounter the contradictions embedded at the discourse level of how low-income youth think about their job, education and future. I found this article pleasurable to read because rather than showing a specific connection between subjects positions and structural inequalities; he leaves the analysis at a level where there are nuances, messiness, and contradiction. Thus leaving us with a more complex picture of how people think about neoliberalism in their everyday lives.

From a distinct but not less disconnected perspective, Jesook Song (2007) eloquently explores the socio-political context of neoliberal subject formation of youth in South Korean history 1997-2001. Specifically, this paper, as Song argues, “analyzes discourses related to the neoliberalized view of value of youth during this period, including discourses on ‘venture companies,’ ‘flexible labor,’ ‘new intellectual,’ and ‘the human capital of youth’” (Song 331). Specifically, this article explores how youth become seen as “deserving” citizens in South Korea during a specific period of national crisis. The specific discourse analyzed by Song is the relationship between welfare governance and labor population control. In other words, Song is attempting to draw us a picture of how neoliberal governmentality worked among youth during this specific historical period.

A micro-level analysis is provided by Abelmann, Park and Kim on their chapter of college ranking and neoliberal subjectivity in South Korea. The specific discursive field is directed towards the concept of human development. As argued by the three authors, new forms of neoliberal subjectivity such as those that they encounter among four college students attending different universities is South Korea “highlight personal ability, style, and responsibility and work to obscure escalating structural inequalities in South Korea” (1). This particular analysis clearly shows how class and gender continue to play pivotal roles that index how neoliberal logic has merged into individuals to create specific subject formations. In this article, as explained, they paid particular attention to the differences according to university prestige as well as family background and found that “the ‘burden’ of human development was borne variously across these campuses and that is powerfully gendered” (15).

Although, at this point, it does not come to a surprise to read how neoliberal governmentality is acting to create specific subject formations across East Asian countries, I will suggest that the implied critique which comes through out these three articles, which is that people are not aware of how they are being governed does not hold to many of the cases illustrated. I think that rather than blaming the neoliberal subject for its failure to recognize his or her own “formation” such as in the case of Heejin, we stop to listen to how she is experiencing the abrupt
neoliberal change.

The articles for this week also show the inherent contradiction that neoliberalism brings. Some are actively performing their subjecthood in “neoliberal” ways according to the logic, however, many more may be simply following their dreams and many, many more are just trying to survive one day at a time. I think that if we stop blaming youth for taking “risked” paths such as becoming pro gamers, businessmen or hi-hop dances, and instead, support decisions.

Response Paper #7:

Preliminary Question: Sergio Lemus

Anthropology 499 AK
Pre-liminary research question

Aihwa Ong (2003) argues that with the increasing globalization of higher education, there has been an influx of international students that come to US and British universities to receive their training. Ong tells us that in modern societies, the “educational enterprise involves both moral and technical training” (2003:139) and the goal from the educational enterprise, “is intended to form morally normative and economically productive citizens for the nation-state” (139). Further, Ong contends that the nexus of flexible citizenship, academic institutions, and fields such as technology, science, and business administration has created a “neolinal anthropos” who seeks knowledge for the sake of employment opportunities only.

Rather, than arguing against this model, in this project, I will take this neoliberal anthropos as a given and investigate the racialization processes of international students here at the University of Illinois. In this particular research project, I will not treat subjects (neoliberal anthropos) as transitory population across global spaces as Aihwa Ong portrays them. I will treat them as individuals who by entering and living here in the United States, they become subject to socialization practices and processes in their “host” societies. For this project, I will concentrate on how they are rendered racial based on their a) nationality (Korean specifically) and b) knowledge being acquired. In short, I will focus on exploring how racial classification affects socialization vis-à-vis other racial groups, and how that in turn affects their own subject formation based on racial terms. We could phrase the hypothesis in this way: Social relations among Koreans and non-Koreans based on race have a direct effect on a Korean subject formation that de-centers national identity for a racial category. I am venturing to pose the question in this way: is it possible to speak of a neoliberal racial anthropos?
Ethnographic Encounter: Korean Luncheon and Rapport Not There
Date: February 26, 2008
Place: Lunch area at a campus church
Time: 12:20 p.m - 1:45 p.m

Ethnographers do not often have it their way. When rapport, a construct often idealized by classical anthropologists, is taken for granted, we often run into unexpected encounters. While discussing our topic in class last week, one of our group members mentioned that in a nearby church, on Tuesdays at noon, Korean students often meet for lunch. Thus, we decided that it would be a good idea to go there and get some information.

Kate and I started walking towards the church. Before entering the complex, an acquaintance of Kate arrived at the same time. I noticed that he glanced at us. He did not say anything besides a good smile and a question: are you guys coming to the church for lunch? Our answer was yes (although I was looking for an easy interview for our project). We entered the church and followed some stars towards the second floor. Before entering the lunch area, two Koreans passed us from behind. As we were about to enter the lunchroom, a Korean female, a male child, and an older male exited the room. We were not sure what we wanted to do once we got there. All we knew was that it was a first step towards making contacts with Korean students.

We entered the room. There were about twenty tables with chairs. Many of them full of Korean students, a couple of white students, two or three Filipinos and an African American, and me and Kate. It was an overwhelming first impression. I was not sure if those students were going to ask you or look at us as if we were in the wrong place. Feelings of excitement and fear I felt. We sat down in a table close to the serving area. Left our coats on the chair as well as our school supplies and decided to get some food. I was given a plate, two metal sticks--I did not learn what they are called—and follow the food line until we were served. They gave us rice, some type of noodles, sauce, and lettuce. A glass of water to drink. We sat down in the table along with a Filipino female that Kate knew from some place. While we were enjoying the lunch, two female girls sat in that same table. There were conversing in an Asian language, which I assumed it was Korean.

I finish my lunch first. I was very hungry. Three hours of class do make you eat afterwards. I felt out of place, turn to Kate, and said, “I never knew this part of the University.” While Kate and her friend finish their meal, I continue observing the behavior. I began to feel uncomfortable, I think that it was when my ethical standards began to kick in and felt that I was taking advantage of the situation. Kate’s friend was saying that she went to a conference in Minnesota the past weekend when she learned that before Spanish invasion of the Philippines, people had writing systems. Something previously unheard for her. She seemed excited about her conference.
It passed a couple of minutes. I turned to Kate and said that it was time to approach some students there. We were not sure what the best way to do it was. I felt awkward, naive, and somehow stupid. Back in my mind, I really questioned whether they really would care about what we wanted to do. Study them! We got up took our place and proceeded to get in line. In this place, after people eat you have to get up and wash your own dishes. While in line, Kate made the first move and said hello to two Asian females and one Asian male. They seemed pretty friendly. After that moment, that first friendly encounter, I felt that my confidence of what I was doing there came back. We finish washing our dishes and decided to look for more people and ask them if they were willing to be interviewed.

I turned to Kate and told her that maybe it would be a good idea to ask those that served—they also seemed to be the organized of the luncheon—and ask them for help. Kate approaches a female student. She was an undergraduate student at U of I. She was very friendly and immediately said that is was okay if we interview her. She began questioning around to those that also helped serve the food. She recommends us to talk with a male that seemed to be in charged of the event. We walked a couple of steps towards were we were sitting. The female that we ask her told the male in charge and while I was glancing back, I overheard that he told her to ask us what type of research we were going. We went to the male and while cooking and not glancing directly at us, he asks us: so what type of research you are going? Kate responded that we wanted to interview a couple of people to find out about their experiences at U of I. The male responded, well, “what exactly are you looking for; I am assuming you are testing a variable or have with you some type of survey?” We looked (me and Kate) glanced at each other and it was when we realize that our interest are not necessarily those of those who we went “to study.” (Of course, I am speaking for myself in the plural). I decided to step in (not necessarily, because I want to be seen as the “hero” but because Kate had made the first move while in waiting in line to wash our dishes).

I told the Korean male that we wanted to do research on Korean student and their experiences of racialization as they arrive in the United States. He seemed to understand what we were looking for but told us in quite a direct manner that we could not do interviews today. He said that we needed to understand that we arrived without telling them, and it was not appropriate to just come in and interview people. He told us that he needed to see an outline of our interview questions and suggested that before doing interview we should come back on the Friday of that week for a short meeting of bible study. Then if we came back a week from our visit, we could then do fifteen minute interviewees with students. In other words, if we wanted to get an interview with a Korean student, we had to wait a week.

As evident, we were disciplined by our subjects. It is an illusion that the
ethnographer has total control of his or her research priorities. Once in
the “field”, the contingencies of life stared you right in your face and
even laugh at your research interests.

March 31, 2008 Group Research Question

Group Members: Kate, Sergio, and Kung Sook

Crossing Identities: Fashion of Korean women in the United States
We hypothesize that female Korean students’ fashion (manifested through clothing, make-up, and accessories) at
UIUC reflects both macro and everyday discourses of individual self-
development, which have intensified with the neoliberalization of both
Korean and U.S. universities. Our hypothesis draws from literature on
the expression of social identities through fashion and consumption
(Bourdieu 1984, Nelson 2006); neoliberal education in South Korea and
the U.S. as an individualist project of cultivating a sellable self
(Ablemann et al. 2008, Brooks 2001, Choi 2005, Ong 2006); and the
influence of transnational migrant students on U.S. racialization and
neoliberal education (Ong 2006). These students’ aesthetic self-
presentation is part of a larger project of fashioning the self as a sellable
product on the job market. Notions of what kind of self is portrayed shift
when students transition from Korean to U.S. universities. The argument
is not the there were not concepts, ideas, or notion of self presentation
back in Korea, but rather, that self presentation acquires a particular
meaning under neoliberalism. To those meaning which are generated by
real people in particular social and political context is what we are after.
Fashion is a powerful means or thechnology of expressing oneself. It is a
physical marker, like “habitus,” indexing participation in certain kinds of
consumption. It is also a type of cultural capital that “needs inculcation,
assimilation and personal investment,” and serves “as a social function
that justifies social difference” (Bourdieu 1984). According to Laura
Nelson (2006:24), “consumption is a system of human
communication....No individual has a process for rational choice that is
divorced from culture or from the dynamic social world that frames and
alters values.” In other words, fashion consumption reflects tastes that
distinguish social group categories, such as class, race, ethnicity, and
gender. Here we will deal with Korean women’s—especially graduate
students’—fashion trends at UIUC and their implications. How do people
see these trends as differentiating between Koreans and other ethnic
groups, and among one another intra-ethnically—between Korean-
Koreans and Korean-Americans, and between newcomers and longer
sojourners? How have these distinctions been influenced by gender
expectations, national policy, and the global market order? Abelmann et
al. (2008) demonstrate through an ethnographic study that students in
Korea increasingly view school diplomas as “mak’û,” or brand names
(11), and their talents and passions as “ait’em,” or sellable items (18)
that they will carry with them as they go onto the job market. Students
both in South Korea and in the U.S. have internalized these neoliberal
notions of education as the cultivation of sellable selves, accepting individual responsibility for their own success by engaging in intense self-sacrifice to gain a competitive edge (Abelmann et al. 2008, Brooks 2001); or conversely, accepting personal responsibility for failures that are often influenced by social constraints such as gender (Abelmann et al. 2008) and social class (Choi 2005). We suggest that by examining Korean students’ attitudes toward fashion, we can uncover the subtle connections between structural social categories and neoliberal self-cultivation that are so often masked in neoliberal discourses around discussion of “freedom” and “choice.” Lastly, our research problem addresses Aihwa Ong’s (2003) argument that the nexus of flexible citizenship (through transnational migration) and academic institutions’ increasing focus on technical training has created a “neoliberal anthropos” that seeks knowledge for the sake of employment opportunities only. We will take this neoliberal anthropos as a given and investigate the racialization processes of international students here at the University of Illinois, by examining how Korean students not only bring ideas about neoliberal education and racialization to the U.S., but also become subject to socialization practices and processes in their host society. We will explore how racial classifications prominent in the U.S. affect Korean students’ socialization vis-à-vis other racial groups, and how that in turn affects their own subject formation and projects of self-cultivation. References not on the course syllabus: Bourdieu, Pierre 1984 Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

March 5, 2008

Through the lens of clothing, we will explore the effects of transnational migration and neoliberal governmentality. In other words, we asking how subjectivities among Koreans change as they become “global” subjects. The study will take place at the University of Illinois. We will focus on graduate students who have come to the U.S. as adults, and gather data through interviews and observations. We will ask questions about what Koreans wear as students at the U of I, in comparison to what they wore in Korea. We will analyze patters of clothing consumption in light of consumer culture in shaping Korean identity and in relation to other consumption patterns of other ethnic and racial groups from the perspective of the Korean subject.

Feb 4, 2008

(We began with this general question during class on March 4, 2008)

Processes of subject-formation, racialization and governmentality.
Experience of Korean Americans

Under globalization, flows of many kinds have ignored national boundaries altogether. Globalization has also brought flows of people in the form of migration either to work or to get an education (Ong 2006). For our preliminary research question we are going to study how individuals are affected at their subjective level by globalization. We are going to use national identity and racial formation as our entry way to analyze how globalization affects individual’s perception of their previous “national” identity and their “post-national” or more globalized oriented identity. In particular, we are going to be looking at how Koreans experience racism at the University of Illinois. In essence we can begin questioning what role does the university plays as a) free, open space of intellectual creativity and interaction (an enlightenment ideal) or the neoliberal (current) university in which difference is central to its structural configuration. In other words, in this type of research, subjects become vehicles to examine neoliberal governmentality at work.

EUI Links:  
Lee-Chung, Sangsook 2007 Korean Early Study Abroad Students: How Do They Narrate Their Personhood as an ESA Student at UIUC? Unpublished manuscript for the Ethnography of the University Initiative.  
This project found that Korean students who come to the U.S. at a young age for early study abroad (in middle or high school) tend to adapt quickly to U.S. cultural norms and often express sentiments of rejection toward recently arrived Korean students who act and appear more markedly “Korean.” Lee-Chung (2007: 20-21) states, “It seems that ESA students’ extent of acculturation to the U.S. society including language acquirement affects their perception, attitude, or judgment of other Korean students.” Our project builds on these internal distinctions that Korean students make amongst themselves, by examining how students view fashion as a marker of their own identities in contrast with other Koreans, and how students use fashion to distinguish themselves as marketable in a highly competitive neoliberal job market. Whitley, Anona 2007 Korean American Aesthetics and Style. Unpublished manuscript for the Ethnography of the University Initiative.  
https://www.ideals.uiuc.edu/handle/2142/1791 This study concluded “that style is intertwined with values about education, religion, and class and is used to mark one’s ethnic identity or to reject it.” One of the distinctions that Whitley found Korean students make through clothing is who is here to have fun and who is here to study. Our project seeks to explore this aspect of dress and self-presentation more deeply, and to look at the implications of fashion for Korean students’ success on the global job market. Through our theoretical perspective, we may be able to take Whitley’s research a step further and address the question of
implications for the university, by looking at ways in which dress is linked to educational and professional success at the discursive level.

Interview/Observ. #2: Data Gathering

Field of Fashion

Aihwa Ong’s (2003) arguments that the nexus of flexible citizenship (through transnational migration) and academic institutions’ increasing focus on technical training has created a “neoliberal anthropos” that seeks knowledge for the sake of employment opportunities only. However, I think that racial identities are not only constructed in the hyper-global space that these students may inhabit, they are also directly connected, one way or another, to “the local,” which I think may often play a bigger role in crafting identity-in-context.

While my classmates have been actively engaged in talking with women about fashion, and to some extend, have described the intra-differentiation that Korean Americans make, I decided to that in order to get to the “racial” signifier of clothing, I needed to make a visit to the Champaign shopping mall. The rationale is this: if students actively engaged in constructing social identity through clothing, one of the places that they would visit will be the mall, thus, encountering different images would invariably have an effect on how they (meaning Korean Americans) would have in their self-identification. Further, as we have commented in class, that neoliberalism has made use of anything available for profit, it would not be a surprise if clothing companies use race as a marker to advertise their products.

I went to the mall last Tuesday night. I knew that if I were to stand outside the stores and start making notes, it would draw attention, and it would not be a surprise if a salesperson or even a manager would come to the door and ask me what I was doing. I also knew that going inside and looking at the advertisement was not an option either. I used a camera to carry out my field investigation. The identity that I embodied was that of a visitor taking pictures of the mall in general but directing those photos to advertisement ads in the storefront.

The first store that I visited was Abercrombie & Fitch. This clothing mark is commonly worn around the U of I campus. The main ad (~4 ft x3ft) located as you enter the store is that of a phenotypically while male. The male in the ad is lying down, looking at the viewer with not shirt on. The store is divided along gender, of course. When think about fashion, we should always keep in mind that we are talking about men too.

The second store visited was Express. The line of clothing of this store is much more formal. The style is directed towards a “professional” class. Clothing seems to be directed towards consumer that have taste in plain, fashionable, but elegant
clothing. Prices are comparable to those of Abercrombie but sometimes they have very good offers. The main ad in this store is on the left side of the front door. The ad is also about the same size that of Abercrombie. However, even though this store also has a men’s line, the ad portrays a woman in her late twenties, phenotypically not as “white” as Abercrombie. The background ad is that of a beach like environment. She is sitting, wearing small shorts and a white fitted blouse. I entered this store after I took the picture. The ads inside the store did not differ in taste.

The third store I visited was American Eagle Outfitters. This experience was different. There are not front ads with specific advertisements. However, once you enter the store, you see ads of phenotypically African Americans and Asians in different parts of the stores according to the gender division of clothing in the store. The clothes are similar in style of that of Abercrombie, but the ads attract a younger set of consumers as the individuals in advertised in the ads look in their early twenties.

The fourth store visited was Hollister Co. This store had similar advertisement strategy. Again, there was a big ad of a male as you look at the front door. This time, the male is seated in beach like environment without a shirt showing his body figure. This store emphasize the what I call “the California Surf” identity.

The firth store visited was GAP. The main add in front of the store shows four females where there is not a specific racial phenotype. The women that appear in the front ad are lively and happy looking at the viewer. I think that consumers are drawn to this store because the line of clothing is not casual, and is directed towards people that dress professionally.

Without analyzing in deep the array of advertisements that these stores promote, it is obviously clear that the brands use “white” consumers as they primary target population. American Eagle is the only brand that seems to advertise to more than one racial population. It would be interesting, now, to go more in deep to the kinds of brands and their significance to Korean Americans. I hope that the next data gathering discusses the symbolism of brand choice.

Group Summary: April 7, 2008 Project: Crossing Identities: Seeing through the fashion of Korean Women in the US Through Kung Sook’s first interview on clothing, she found that not only is there considerable difference between Korean fashion and American style but also there is some intra-ethnic tension among the Korean groups in the US: Korean-Korean and Korean-American. There is a perspective of "othering" in seeing each other. Especially Korean-Americans tend to define Korean-Korean fashion as more snobby. They call the new comers FOBs disdainfully,
and Korean-Koreans consider Korean Americans to be "whitewashed," identifying ethnically with Whites in the US. Nevertheless, these interviews show that both fashion styles strongly reflect the global trends of commodification and class distinction. Kate’s interviews highlighted ways in which clothing signifies ethnic differences between Korean, Chinese, and Japanese students in the US. While many White Americans fail to distinguish between these ethnic groups, for South Koreans, clothing is a significant marker of intra-Asian as well as intra-Korean distinctions. In contrast with Kung Sook’s findings, Kate’s second interviewee tied her Americanized clothing style as an undergrad in the US four years ago to Black hip-hop culture, rather than White styles of dress. She attributed this to popular singers and television shows that are constantly changing and leading fashion trends. This emphasis on mass media as a key player influencing Korean popular fashion came up frequently in our interviews. Kung Sook concluded from her second interview that the present fashion (among the younger generation) is disseminated mainly through the Internet. TV has been become a little old fashioned. And the trend that has been popular by mass media is sponsored by some big fashion and cosmetic corporations. They make people want to buy their products through the circulation of the images performed by entertainers. These phenomena are the same in Korea and in the US. Actually no nation state citizen can avoid the bombard of globally circulated cultural commodities (the cultural hegemony is in the US). But there are some differences depending on their specific cultural traditions. Korean female college students seemed to be more exposed to this uniformly commodified fashion. They are not resistant. Is it because they are more conscious of other’s gaze? Kung Sook thinks this consciousness partly comes from the traditional Confucian attitude. Confucious emphasized more harmonious relations among a certain group than one’s doing conspicuous or individual behaviors. And even in one’s attire, there has been an emphasis on the formal and polite manners. Koreans pursuit of more suit style is not unrelated to this Confucian ideology. Moreover, Koreans are more fragile in being commodified and capitalized in their consumption. It’s partly because of their relatively fast-paced modernization and economic growth. This modernization and growth was managed by government and some big conglomerates called "Jaebeol" ? As Laura Nelson points out, Koreans consumption was promoted by government policy during the past modernization period. After the mid-1980’s, there emerged a wealthy middle class and the active consumption was promoted by the government. After the IMF crisis in 1997, Korean government lost the control power over their citizens’ consumption. Since then, Korean society has been very fragile in the globally neoliberal economy. Koreans have been soaked into the "flow of various capital around the world" (Cho Hae-Joang, 2005). This capital flow is not only limited to money, but also encompasses media and cultural commodities. It seems
that the pursuit of self-development takes on a different character when Korean students come to study in the United States. In Korean society, where people monitor one another’s public behavior and presentation more closely, clothing style is more carefully policed. Within the US, clothing seems to become less a marker of self-cultivation and more closely tied to ethnic identities, such as Korean American, Korean, Chinese, Japanese, White and Black American.


Shifting Identities: Fashion Choices as Social Capital for Korean Women in the United States

Abstract

In this short study, we looked at the relationship between clothing and identity among female Korean students at the University of Illinois. Our hypothesis was that neoliberal subjects are actively using clothing as a way to reach individual self-development in both Korean and U.S. universities. The greater goal was to explore how and why students attribute meaning to their fashion choices within particular social, cultural and political contexts. The questions asked were answered through everyday discourse on fashion and practices through individual interviews with Korean students, a macro-level analysis of clothing through a range of advertisements from clothing brands, and observing students on campus. Keywords: race, neoliberalism, clothing, fashion, gender, Korean, Asian

Research Problem

In this collaboratively research project, we looked at the relationship between fashion and meaning through national identity discourses among female Korean students at the University of Illinois. Our initial hypothesis was that neoliberal subjects are actively using clothing as a way to reach individual self-development in both Korean and U.S. universities. The greater goal was to explore how students attributed meaning to their fashion choices within particular social, cultural, and political contexts. In other words, although I specifically argued that transnational subjects actively use clothing to manifest a neoliberal self, we collectively found a number of reasons why students choose to dress in particular ways.

Particular findings generated from this research were that clothing is instrumentally and contextual. Different fashion styles were identified within different groups. The students interviewed are aware that clothing
is an important marker to differentiate who belongs or not among racial and ethnic groups at the U of I. For example, the interviewers directly identified differences in clothing patterns between Koreans as well as Japanese, Chinese, and American. Interviewers are aware that people’s perceptions influence their identity, thus, they consider that aspect in constructing identity. Our research suggests that there are important differences enacted through clothing among Korean women, in this study, they are aware of the space they occupy and how moving from spatial contexts shifts their style of dress.

To situate our topic explicitly within a body of literature we relied on Pierre Bourdeau (1984) class-based explanatory model without emphasizing his notion of the marked distinctions between mass and high culture. On the other hand, we theorized fashion as a physical marker as well as a type of cultural capital that "needs inculcation, assimilation and personal investment," and serves "as a social function that justifies social difference" (Bourdieu 1984). To understand why Koreans are investing in clothing and fashion as a marker of cultural capital, we utilized literature on how the neoliberal ethos is influencing college students in Korea as well as in the U.S. (Abelmann et al. 2008, Choi 2005, Brooks 2001, Ong 2006). These authors emphasize that employment rather than other factors are currently influencing and structuring individual choices of those who adhere to neoliberal logics, and putting pressure on people to enact a neoliberal, entrepreneurial global self. Lastly, by using Aihwa Ong (2006) discussion of transnational processes under neoliberalism is also useful; she identifies Asian youths as embodying a neoliberal anthropos. A key question in our research was to explore whether people make conscious connections between clothing and a "racial" identity under the U.S context. In other words, are Korean students actively using clothing to compensate for a perceived racial hierarchy an in the process constructing and developing a neoliberal self?

Methodology

The questions we asked were explored through individual interviews with Korean students, macro-level analysis of clothing through a range of advertisements as well as Korean television drama, and observations of Korean students on campus. Researchers own subjective experiences and informal conversations offered insight into the study. Kyung Sook brought her experiences as international students from Korea, Kate Grim-Feinberg’s transnational perspective of having live in Latin America remain central to think about fashion in a global scale. I am a Latino graduate college student born in Mexico.
Findings

Our findings illustrate that there is not specific “way of dressing” which directly identifies an individual with a specific racial, cultural, and ethnic group. However, certain trends appear to be present at the discursive and much less on the practical level. Rather, clothing is contextual and temporary as people navigate. As Victor Turner already noted when he coined the term social skin, clothing has a dual quality of which “invites us to explore both the individual and collective identities that the dressed bodies enable” (Hansen 2004: 372). Furthermore, as our interviewers tell us, for them dress, clothing and fashion is a very, very malleable aspect of individuals, and it is contextually managed. As Hansen neatly tell us, dress becomes “a flash point of conflicting values, fueling in historical encounters, in interactions across, between genders and generations, and in recent global cultural and economic exchanges” (Hansen 2004:372).

Specifically, in our interviews, we found that students consciously differentiate between perceived nationalities, races, classes, and gender through fashion and clothing. For example, Jin-ah, a graduate student majoring in the Humanities comments that there are “two different” styles in her closet, one “American” and the other “Korean.” For Jin-ah, Korean students seem to be more aware of clothing, which in turn differentiates among Koreans themselves between one, one and a half and second generation of Koreans. Some students discuss that they are even one-point-eight generation of Korean ethnicity. Korean students acknowledge the contextual nature of clothing as well as how through clothes one expresses nationality, intra-ethnic differences, age, and taste. A second interview showed that Korean student make choice in regards to clothing. Jaeyoon is a transferred student in EALC from a Korean University. Jaeyoon clearly states that she does not wear the same clothes here in the U.S. She comments, “I don’t wear the clothes I brought from Korea. I have to get all the new clothes here,” thus, signaling a conscious use of clothing as instrumental and situational. Furthermore, Jeayonn says, “Fashion shows which group a person belong to. When I’m here, I don’t wear in Korean style, because I don’t want to give an impression that I’m not a member here. I don’t want to draw others’ attention by my unfamiliar fashion.”

Identification by brand with race seems to be present when various students talk about “American” style and “Korean” style of clothing. For instance, two Korean students unconsciously identified the line of clothing Abercrombie & Fitch with “American” style of dress. Thus, by identifying this brand with “whiteness,” we are seeing to what extend a racial hierarchy have as influence the meanings attached to clothing. Jin-
ah mentioned that she liked to wear Abercrombie because of the casual style of the clothes. An interviewee with the name of Mary also identified Abercrombie as a store of her choice. Through an analysis of advisements, it is obviously clear that the brands use “white” consumers as they primary target population. This clothing mark is commonly worn around the U of I campus. The main ad (~4 ft x3ft) located as you enter the store at Market Mall in Champaign, Illinois is that of a phenotypically white male. The male in the ad is lying down, looking at the viewer with no shirt on. The store is divided along gender, of course. When we think about fashion, we should always keep in mind that we are talking about men too. From their website, the following description is given by the company, “The highest quality, casual, All-American lifestyle clothing for aspirational men and women” (A&F website).

Popular culture and advertisement play a central role in configuring fashion choice. In the interviews done by Kate Grim-Feinberg and Kyung Sook Kim suggests that popular television shows such as Sex in the City and Friends communicate to Koreans in South Korean that what they are watching is an “American” way of life, fashion, and attitudes. The Korean television drama Love Story in Harvard portrayed life of graduate students in a U.S. university. The interaction between the characters in this film reinforces the perception that white people in the U.S. cannot differentiate between ethnic and racial groups, thus, this attitude is filtrated to Koreans as gain cultural knowledge in the U.S.

The interviewers rarely identified differences between U.S. racial and ethnic minorities. They identified the following identities through clothing: “Americans,” “Koreans,” “Korean-Americans,” “Chinese,” and “Japanese.” There are two explanations which suggest: a) fashion is usually associated with what is normative and in the U.S. the norms is to look fashionably “white,” thus, race becomes an unmarked “thing” that directly or indirectly Korean students consider when they choose what to wear and b) Korean students are aware the power of “whiteness” brings when attempting to put a “social skin” in the context of the university life.

Conclusion

We now know, through ethnographic research done among Korean students, that clothing is very malleable, instrumental and contextual. There is not a “Korean” way, or “American” way of dressing, rather, there are discursive interpretations of what constitutes identities. However, clothing is not divorced from the context that international Koreans currently live. As some scholars argue “our lived experience with clothes, how we feel about them, hinges on how other evaluate our crafted appearances, and this experience in turn is influenced by the situation
and the structure of the wider context (Woodward 2005). In short, we should think of clothing working together with the body and performance that individual enact in various contexts.

Consumption in Korea has had a long history of state intervention. Nelson tells us about a specific discourse of “responsible” consumer behavior in South Korea by “examining the ways in which the terms of this discourse shifted with changing local circumstances” (2006: 189). South Korean’s consumer practices, as Nelson contends, should be traced back to the colonial period when Japan colonized Korea between 1905 and 1910. Consumption was not a widespread practice, and for the most part, it was practiced by a small group of urban yangban. For Korean consumers, the colonial period served as an important “learning” phase where much of the elite population emulated Japanese-style goods and services. Then, from 1961 until 1993, South Korea had a series of authoritative generals such as General Park Chung-hee. Scarring for the good of the nation was a monologue and the political goals of South Korea. Among them: “promotion of the public welfare, freedom from exploitation, the fair distribution of income amongst the people” (2006:192). Indeed, it is not a surprise to find that Korean students at the University of Illinois consciously use clothing and fashion to enact a social self, thus, in the process constructing identities-in-context.

Our initial theoretical formulation in the early stages of this project was to use clothing and fashion as an entry point of reference to understand how Korean students as “neoliberal subjects” use clothes to enact a neoliberal self that only seeks self-development and academic excellence. Aihwa Ong (2003) argues that with the increasing globalization of higher education, there has been an influx of international students that come to US and British universities to receive their training. Ong tells us that in modern societies, the “educational enterprise involves both moral and technical training” (2003:139) and the goal from the educational enterprise, “is intended to form morally normative and economically productive citizens for the nation-state” (139). Further, Ong contends that the nexus of flexible citizenship, academic institutions, and fields such as technology, science, and business administration has created a “neoliberal anthropos” who seeks knowledge for the sake of employment opportunities only.

In our study, we found that there is a multiplicity of reasons why Korean students at the university choose clothing. Some students think that dressing in certain ways increases their social capital and access to spaces of “White” privileged. Other students directly suggest that they have different clothing lines when they are in Korea and when they are in
the U.S. The ability to see clothing differences offers Korean students the knowledge and the power to navigate between the transnational spaces that some students interviewed occupy. There is no “one” way of being a neoliberal subject, rather, individuals act and construct their identities as their social, political and cultural context shifts back and forth between Korea and the U.S.


Reflect: This is the second time that I engage in online research project with the Ethnography of the University Initiative. The format of the EUI is quite useful to develop student’s research systematically. I did not feel lost or concerned about the direction of the project anytime during the semester. I believe that research in a constant process that involves instances of intellectual vision, erroneous conclusions, passive responses, active engagements, and subtle conclusion thought out the time of the study. Thus, taking aside the technical difficulties that sometimes students had when attempting to format text on atlas moodle, once you get a handle on that aspect, the research process flows smoothly. Compliance with IRB stipulations was very straightforward, out research associates were not confused about what type of forms we
were to give to informants as well as procedures involved.

I feel that even though we are hesitant to make overarching conclusions about clothing and fashion among Korean women, we feel confident that we have analyzed fashion and identity in from everyday discourse to macro level analysis. We attempted to stay close to the ground in regards to theorizing and rejected the Aihwa Ong’s argument of the neoliberal anthropos as normative, homogenous, and consistent. We feel confident that we can archive this work so students can know the pitfalls we encountered as well as to what direction they can take their research if they become interested in clothing and fashion among Korean students at the U of I.

I found very difficult to work as a group, at times, we wanted to shift the project to different directions. However, as the semester progressed, we remain attentive to each other suggestions and took every comment each member discussed. I found that working with my classmates proved to be a challenge but a rewarding experience. This is a key component that these type of classes should keep because it forces you work hard and to receive early comments on your thoughts and there is an intrinsic process of intellectual check and balances among the students in the group. I enjoyed the experience and hope to work again in collaboration with colleagues of this type.

**Recommendations:**

To future researches:

- If you are planning to do research among students that are different from you in terms of race, ethnicity, or race, please contact potential informant very early in the semester. People have many things to do and may not see the important to talk to a stranger about research.

- Do not worry about finding a specific topic, research process of narrow well-focused research study. As the semester, progresses you will see that there are particular topics that will begin clustering and informing your research orientations. Early interviews will help.

- We have encountered a number of ways in which Korean students identify through clothing. Be aware that there is no a “Korean” or ‘American’ way of dressing, these formations emerge discursively, although you should not ignore the material conditions.

- We should have spent more time doing participant-observation, meaning, actually following students to shopping centers and inquiry of their decision of purchasing particular items.

- We should have also narrowed our focus within a particular academic
population. I am petty sure that taste will differ from business school students than from sociology students. This project is for the future.

- If you were going to be working in a group project, urge students do not migrate to other groups, this would create confusion and distractions. Try to work with what you have and make agreements. Talk to each other. Luckily, we were quite successful in communicating once our group members remained stable.

- The next project should move from creating oppositional identities such as “Korean” vs. “American” and engaging in differences within national groups.

- A study of men is missing. That is an interesting project that future students can develop in a multiple of interesting ways.

To the University:

- The university should be more active with the Asian American academic and cultural units to look the difference among Asian is a good thing and would not diminish the political project of these units on campus.

- Asian organization should also acknowledge diversity among national populations and organize informational events to create awareness of Asian multiculturalism.

Prelim. Research Prop.: Ethnographic Funding Proposal

By: Sergio Lemus, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign ANTH 499AK: South East Asian Youth

May 12, 2008

Title: Performing Identities: Masculinity among Korean Men in Los Angeles’s Koreatown

Abstract

I propose to conduct a one-year doctoral ethnographic research in the city of Los Angeles in a traditionally ethnic neighborhood named Koreatown in order to investigate the semiotic context from which Korean American masculinity emerges among young adults. Koreatown is located in Los Angeles and it encompasses a larger area that includes the adjacent neighborhoods of Wilshire Center, Harvard Heights, and
Pico Heights where Koreans began moving to this area during the 1960s.

Asian masculinity within the context of white America has been devaluated and femininized. I argue that understandings of masculine identity yield structural relations of power, which are manifested through cultural conceptions of gender constructions. This project will contribute to a cultural analysis of Korean American youth sense of identity in a global context.

Statement of Problem

Studies of masculinity have called for a more inclusive “international masculinity research” and for “an understanding of the world of gender order” as “a necessary basis for thinking about men and masculinities globally” says R.W. Connell in his inaugural issue of Men and Masculinities journal in 1998. In the context of “white” America, studies on masculinity have focused on understanding “men of color” as a standard concession (Doyle 1989: 280 and Loui 2003: 2). Within these studies, the Asian American male is stereotyped as “instructable” and “more conservative.” (Doyle 1989: 290-1). Indeed, scholarship on Asian American men has suggested that living, as man in the West can be very negative and characterized as “racial castration” (Eng 2001). As Henry Yu argues, “[a]lthough often portrayed as sexual treats to white women, Asian men were also emasculated by stereotypes of passivity and weakness. The image of the Chinese laundryman and domestic worker or Japanese flower gardener, willing to do “women’s work” that not self-respecting white man would perform, serve to feminized the portrayal of Oriental men” (Yu 2001: 131).

In light of R.W. Connell’s suggestion to study global masculinity, this project will offer a cultural analysis of gender constructions among Korean American males in Los Angeles’s Koreatown, home of about 300,000 thousand Korean immigrants. Los Angeles’s Koreatown is a community, which maintains over 150 associations, 500 Christian churches, 15 Buddhist temples, 32 newspapers, and a 24-hour radio station. At Koreatown, I will explore the multiple meanings of masculinity as well as its peformative aspects that Korean American males enact, attach meaning to, and actively construct in their everyday life. In other words, by highlighting identity as performed, this project will offers us an example of thinking about the ways in which cultural meanings are constructed, negotiated, and contested through embodied performative acts of representation. This doctoral ethnographic project will help me to contribute to scholarship that takes men as subjects of
study seriously within a feminist framework.

Proposed Research

I propose to spend a yearlong in a predominately-Korean neighborhood of Los Angeles’s Koreatown. During this period, I will work as a participant-observer, conduct in deep formal and informal interviews which will facilitate the exploration and shifting meanings attached to Korean American masculinity. Specific discussions will revolve around issues of fathering, parenthood, gender, race, transnational identity, and performativity.

I am in my second year of the doctoral program in Anthropology at the University of Illinois. I hold a B.A. in Latin American Studies from this institution and a M.A. in Anthropology from the University of California at Riverside. I also took, while still an undergraduate at UIUC, a graduate-level Research Design, and Methods. Later, at the University of California at Riverside I took a one-year sequence seminar on Core Theory in Anthropology, which has prepared to think critically about contemporary social life from a transnational perspective.

I have taken a graduate level course in Culture, Biology, and Identity as well as course on ethnography and methodology. These include courses in Contemporary Ethnography and Methods of Cultural Anthropology. I am finishing courses in East Asian Youth Culture and Politics of Life. I will continue my language training in Korean language here at the University of Illinois. I have taken two graduate level language classes and will complete the proficiency exam on Korean language before heading to the field. I am also cognizant of the protocols directed by the Institutional Review Board ad UIUC; I have attached a human subject’s review form.

Significance of Research

Based on previous research about fashion carried out among Korean women at the University of Illinois, this collaboratively research project found that, for example, there is a multiplicity of reasons why Korean students at the university choose clothing. Some students think that dressing in certain ways increases their social capital and access to spaces of “white” privileged. Other students directly suggest that they have different clothing lines when they are in Korea and when they are in the U.S. The ability to see clothing differences offers Korean students the knowledge and the power to navigate between the transnational spaces that some students interviewed occupy.
In this sense, this project will be an extension of research already known. I will expect to find multiple meanings of Korean American masculinity vis-à-vis “other” masculinities, thus, highlighting that men as a gender category is itself constructed and deconstructed through everyday life events, and can include the activities of daily life, community practices, even extend to practices like cooking, shopping, labor, and clothing. Indeed, this project will look at the mundane and messy semiotic nature of meanings to explore understandings of masculine identity through relations of power that is manifested through cultural conceptions of gender productions among Korean men and women.

Bibliography


Kibria, Nazli 2002 Becoming Asian American: Second-Generation


