Where to Look: A Response to Min and Park Regarding Korean Immigrant Entrepreneurship, the Disadvantage Thesis, and Colorblind Racism
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What is This?
It is with great pleasure that I respond to the rejoinders written by Dr. Pyong Gap Min and Dr. Kyeyoung Park to my article, ‘Colorblind Racism and Institutional Actors’ Explanations of Korean Immigrant Entrepreneurship’, which was published in the January 2010 issue of *Critical Sociology*. I say great pleasure because along with appreciating people reading my work in general, I am delighted to receive the feedback from two noted scholars whose studies have helped pave the way for my own inquiry into Korean immigrant entrepreneurship.1

When I first read the commentaries, I was taken back to when I initially began conducting my dissertation research, which engendered my article under debate. I remember how a professor in my sociology department asked why I was studying Korean immigrant entrepreneurship because, as he put it, did we not already know the causes of Koreans’ concentration in small business? Having studied the topic since I first wrote a paper on black-Korean conflict for a social problems course during undergrad, I was intrigued with both the phenomenon of Korean immigrant entrepreneurship and the sub-field of Korean small business studies that has developed in the past 30 years – partially facilitated of course by the important work of the two scholars to whom I respond here. I wrote my dissertation to re-examine the sources of Koreans’ capital and to address a noticeable absence in the literature, namely a lack of detailed attention to banking, US Government agency support, and *typification*, or how those with resources and power perceive and assess ethnic groups that partially determine their socioeconomic outcomes (Portes and Rumbaut 1996: 85). Basically, when I embarked on my dissertation research, I did not think it was a ‘done deal,’ i.e. I believed that there was still new work to be done, and more importantly, new ways of examining old literature and the conclusions derived from it. Most of the literature *does* mention the institutional aspects I examine, but, for the most part, remains preoccupied with the behavioral, cultural, and
organizational responses of Korean immigrants to their disadvantage. Thus I sought to fill an empirical void by documenting the institutional mechanisms that facilitate the capitalization of Korean immigrants that had hitherto gone understudied and under-theorized in the literature. Specifically, I interviewed 81 respondents who worked or volunteered for Korean banks operating in Los Angeles and New York and seven US federal agencies or commissions dedicated to economic or business development.

But my interest in drawing attention to institutional support was not simply driven by empirical concerns. I was, and still am, troubled by how the disadvantage thesis accentuates adaptation, a common feature of the immigrant analogy and indeed, the American dream narrative. As I discuss later, the preoccupation with adaptation strategies is what led me to label the disadvantage thesis a colorblind racist approach.

In the following, I address the most salient issues raised by Min and Park. They are

1) the sources of Koreans’ capital and the role of banks and the state in the emergence of post-1965 Korean immigrant entrepreneurship;
2) the role of Korean banks today; and
3) culture, behavior, and the disadvantage thesis as colorblind racism.

Sources of Koreans’ Capital and Korean Banks in the Early Stage of Korean Business

Both Min and Park state that my consideration of the disadvantage thesis confuses the cause of Korean immigrants’ gravitation to small business ownership with their sources of capitalization. As detailed in my literature review, the disadvantage thesis posits that immigrants and/or people of color are disadvantaged in the primary labor market and thus seek alternative routes to employment vis-a-vis small business ownership. Additionally, many scholars argue that Koreans are also disadvantaged when it comes to accessing bank loans and government business development programs.

Park rightfully points out that a range of structural approaches, including segmented labor market theory, have been utilized to account for immigrant disadvantage. Yet I was less interested in identifying the sources of Koreans’ labor market disadvantage than I was in considering how the disadvantage thesis, while perhaps not providing us with a complete roadmap for tracing Koreans’ sources of capital, does hint at where we should not look. To iterate, the approach suggests that Koreans, as non-white immigrants, have difficulty accessing resources from financial and government institutions. Yet we have to assume that Koreans get their resources from somewhere, and this ‘somewhere’ is presumably not banks or government agencies. Hence the focus on imported capital, kin and social networks, rotating credit associations, and private deals between Koreans in the literature I cite. It is the preoccupation with imported/co-ethnic resources that motivated me to explore support external to the group.2

In their rejoinders, Min and Park address my discussion of Korean banks. Both argue that Korean banks played a minimal role in the capitalization of Korean firms in the early
stages of post-1965 Korean immigrant business development in the USA. Min points out, ‘Korean immigrant businesses started in the early 1970s when there were only a few branches of the Korean Exchange Bank in the USA.’ And Park states, ‘Few Korean immigrants in New York City (in the late 1980s) received bank loans, as they lacked the credit histories required for obtaining loan funds.’ Drawing from their own studies conducted in the 1980s, both conclude that Korean immigrants drew primarily from co-ethnic sources such as free room and board, loans from rotating credit associations and Korean individuals, as well as savings brought from South Korea.

I want to provide a brief, alternative account of the impact of Korean banking on the development of post-1965 Korean immigrant entrepreneurship, drawing from sources that have documented the emergence of key Korean business industries in the 1960s and 1970s.

Post-1965 Korean retail businesses in the USA sold two of the earliest exports out of South Korea, wigs and clothing, and subsequently, export-import and wholesale industries grew to support retail efforts. Because wigs were an international phenomenon, Korean manufacturers began setting up branches in major US cities, including Los Angeles (Chin et al. 1996: 496). The South Korean government, ‘upon recognizing the significant role of Korean immigrant entrepreneurs in wig export … financially supported Korean immigrant wig importers through the Korean Exchange Bank (KEB)’ (Chin et al. 1996: 498). Established in Los Angeles in 1967, the KEB, ‘a wholly owned entity of the Republic of Korea’ (Light and Bonacich 1988: 266), ‘spurred business activities among Korean immigrants in the Los Angeles area through its business supporting loans’ (Chin et al. 1996: 498). Light and Bonacich (1988: 266) found from their interview with a bank manager that most of KEB’s customers were Korean, with the export-import industry being the main business with which the bank worked. After wigs, the ‘clothing industry was the second major recipient’ of KEB’s capital since the industry ‘was much larger in 1975 than wigs in terms of employment and total capital investment’. Although business owners involved in the wigs and clothing industries were the primary beneficiaries of KEB, the bank also lent to Koreans who opened up gas stations and restaurants.

Along with KEB, three privately-owned Korean banks existed in Los Angeles between 1975 and 1978. These banks specialized in import-export and foreign exchange, including remittances and corporate finance. According to a general manager of one of the banks interviewed by Light and Bonacich (1988: 267–8), the three banks ‘made no loans to small businesses or consumers’ and instead worked mainly with Korean corporations. However, the California Korea Bank (CKB), a subsidiary of KEB, was established in 1974, and was licensed as a full-service bank. While also working with Korean corporations, about 40 percent of CKB’s outstanding loans in 1978 were held by Korean residents of Los Angeles. The establishment and lending practices of KEB and CKB represented ‘intervention by the government of South Korea on behalf of Koreans abroad’ (Light and Bonacich 1988: 266). In the process, South Korea was also institutionalizing Korean financial institutions in the USA, which would help the government regulate Korean financial activities to the benefit of South Korea’s economy.

In 1962, South Korea changed its emigration policies to encourage nationals to leave, in part so they could remit money back to the country (Kim 1981: 52). However, the emigration of its nationals also had unintended consequences as many post-1965 Korean
immigrants smuggled out large amounts of cash from South Korea to circumvent restrictions on how much money they could take with them upon departure. As Kim (1981: 64) recounts, the South Korean government became concerned about the flight of dollars amid reports of wealthier Korean immigrants purchasing property and small businesses in the United States with large amount of cash – ‘sometimes out of paper bags’ – smuggled out of South Korea. Along with being concerned with the demoralization of national solidarity in the confrontation with North Korea South Korea was concerned that capital, ‘which is largely amassed by commercial loans from advanced nations, especially from the United States, thus leaks back into the United States’ rather than remain in South Korea (Kim 1981: 65). In response to the exodus of dollars, South Korea changed its emigration policy in 1975 to restrict ‘persons who own properties valued more than $100,000’ (Kim 1981: 65).3

In sum, several Korean banks helped finance the Korean export-import industry as well as institutionalize US-based Korean immigrant financial activities in service to South Korea’s economy. More, the KEB also helped increase Korean immigrants’ financial literacy: ‘At first, the bank had to take the initiative by encouraging Korean immigrants to borrow because they did not know how to utilize this financial system’ (Chin et al. 1996: 498). Although the KEB experienced high rates of loan defalcations, which suggests that the bank ‘had made loans to Koreans on terms too liberal’ for the market (Light and Bonacich 1988: 268), it nevertheless was an important vehicle for the capitalization of Korean business in the late 1960s. Chin et al. (1996: 498) conclude, ‘Due to its support, several immigrant wig import trading companies grew rapidly in the early 1970s.’ Moreover, the three privately-owned Korean banks operating during the mid to late 1970s also contributed to the growth of the wig industry by working with corporations rather than directly with small business owners. The significance of these banks in helping establish a Korean business community is underscored by the observation that ‘the wig industry precipitated the emergence of the entrepreneurial class among Korean immigrants’ (Chin et al. 1996: 503).

In other words, while not all - and perhaps not even the majority of - Korean individuals received loans from banks (Korean or otherwise), Korean financial institutions participated in, the growth of key industries and thus helped establish a co-ethnic economic infrastructure that promoted Korean economic development in both the USA and South Korea.4 Regarding the USA, the growth of these key industries was accompanied by an increased number of Korean-owned businesses in the finance, insurance, and real estate (FIRE) sector. Light and Bonacich (1988: 161–2) report that although Koreans in Los Angeles county were ‘massively overrepresented’ in retail trade, there was a steady increase in the number of Korean-owned FIRE businesses between 1975 and 1982.

Although the acts of mutual assistance discussed by Min and Park may be relatively advantageous for Korean immigrants, the significance of these acts cannot be separated from the development of a co-ethnic economic infrastructure. I admit it would be great if I could provide the exact number of Korean individuals who received bank loans. Yet I do not think that a lack of numbers on this score invalidates a consideration of how
Korean banks and the US state – as well as the South Korean state – helped Korean businesses, from small firms to corporations, develop and flourish in the USA. Indeed, this institutional assistance must be considered a condition of possibility for the micro-level exchanges between Koreans as documented by Min and Park, to translate into a social phenomenon (Korean immigrant entrepreneurship) instead of simply remaining at the level of transactions between co-ethnics.

Korean Banking (and Government Support) Today

Both Min and Park acknowledge the growth of Korean banking in the USA but slightly differ in terms of its relevance for Korean business today. According to Min, based on his ‘research on Korean immigrant entrepreneurship over the last 28 years’, ‘neither Korean banks’ nor US Government institutions’ favorable treatment of Korean immigrants in loan processes is one of the major factors that explain their high representation in small business ownership’. He continues: ‘Since the middle of the 2000s, more Korean immigrants may have benefited from loans from Korean banks and the SBA. But, even now, only a small number of Korean immigrants who have several years of business experience seem to get loans from Korean banks or the SBA to start their businesses, with few new Korean immigrants becoming beneficiaries of these loans’. Park comments, ‘Definitely, since the 1990s, the use of transpacific capital and bank loans became more popular. Nonetheless, the Korean American National Survey, conducted by the Center for Asian-Pacific Leadership, University of Southern California in 2010, reported that 56 percent of Korean immigrant entrepreneurs relied on personal funds and 19 percent on bank loans as their start-up capital. Little has changed in this structural pattern.’

With few exceptions (Light and Bonacich 1988; Nopper 2009a, 2010; Park and Kim 2008), published studies rarely include interviews with Korean bankers, or government employees, about Korean business. For the most part, scholars have relied primarily on Korean immigrants to report sources of capital and in turn, have used these responses to discount the role of Korean banks and US Government business development services, both of which have grown since the first wave of post-1965 Korean business. Although I cannot pinpoint the actual number of Koreans who have been served by the institutions I studied, all of the bankers I interviewed cited Koreans, and specifically Korean immigrants, as 80–90 percent of their clientele, with the exception of two respondents giving a figure as low as 50–60 percent. All of the respondents, some of whom worked as lending officers for their banks’ SBA programs, talked about their institutions’ focus on small business lending. Indeed, several respondents mentioned that their banks were initially established to promote small business among Korean immigrants, a narrative also found on most banks’ websites.

Yet the focus on loans in the literature has resulted in minimal attention to other services Korean banks offer clients. But these other services help demonstrate my point that we cannot rely on the numbers of Koreans getting loans as the sole indicator of the import of Korean banks. More, a focus on these programs also helps us identify
collaborations between Korean banks and US federal agencies that, with the exception of Min's and Park's references to the Small Business Administration's (SBA) guaranteed loan program, goes unmentioned in most accounts of capitalization and informational networks among Korean business owners. As both my dissertation (Nopper 2008) and articles (Nopper 2009a, 2009b, undated) detail, along with making business loans, Korean banks serve as conduits to or house government programs that emphasize financial literacy, small business development, and intra-ethnic and interracial network building. Many programs focus specifically on Koreans; they include Korean-language Money Smart, offered by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), the Asian Pacific Islander Small Business Program (API SBP), partially sponsored by the SBA and its resource partner, the Small Business Development Center, the Korean-language Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) that was established in Queens, New York, and the Korean-language Fast Trac course offered by the Los Angeles Minority Business Enterprise Center, a resource partner of the Minority Business Development Agency. I became aware of all of these programs and how Korean banks and US Government agencies collaborate to make them available by interviewing the 81 respondents whose racial ideologies about Koreans I document in my article.

Taken together, I have a difficult time believing that Korean banking has had little impact on the rate of Korean business ownership, which despite Min's claim that it has declined, is still going strong.6 Further, by interviewing those who work for Korean banks and US Government agencies dedicated to economic and business development, I also learned of the ways that Korean banks work with those generally not considered 'good on paper'. According to Min, few new Korean immigrants receive loans. Again, a concern with only the number of Koreans getting loans can prevent us from considering the many ways Korean banks benefit recent immigrants. As explored in my article 'The Globalization of Korean Banking and Korean Immigrant Entrepreneurship in the United States' (2009a), banks chartered in South Korea that operate in the USA provide opportunities that help mediate recent Korean immigrants' lack of financial and experiential histories in the USA by verifying property ownership and business, residential, and credit histories in South Korea. While these practices, most notably transnational collateralization, are utilized by banks serving a range of ethnic groups (Li et al. 2001), my findings speak to a need to reevaluate the preoccupation with immigrant disadvantage when it comes to accessing financial resources in a new country as well as the conclusions we make regarding the relevance of Korean banks to Korean small business.

Regarding poorer or working-class Korean immigrants, it is correct to argue that not every Korean immigrant will have the financial background – in the USA or South Korea – that makes them attractive to banks. Indeed, the significance of ethnic banks is not predicated on whether they will lend to every single individual of the ethnic group they target. Nevertheless, in terms of working-class Korean immigrants, banks and US Government programs, some of which are conducted in collaboration with each other, target working-class Koreans. For example, the FDIC's Korean-language Money Smart, the API SBP, and the Korean-language SCORE work with those who may not be good on paper, even transnationally, to 'groom' them into the mechanics of working with American banks,
develop co-ethnic and interracial networks, and provide business information and counseling.

Culture, Behavior, and the Disadvantage Thesis as Colorblind Racism

Min and Park take issue with me labeling the disadvantage thesis a colorblind racist approach. They argue that the practices among Korean immigrants explored in their studies are treated as adaptive strategies rather than inherent cultural characteristics. Min explains: ‘Sociological studies have interpreted immigrants’ hard work, kin/family ties, and ethnic ties, with a few exceptions, more as behavioral reactions to the immigrant situation than as ethnic-specific cultural dispositions.’ Park points out, ‘I used the notion of culture in referring to a different strategy in organizing various forms of social relations (gender, family/kin, race/ethnicity, etc.). Thus my book examines why Koreans gravitate toward small businesses and how the structural imperatives of this process lead to transformations of Korean gender, kinship, family, and religion, and, more broadly, cultural beliefs and ideologies.’

I wholeheartedly agree with Min and Park that culture is not inherent, biological, fixed, or static. Indeed, I mention in my literature review that the disadvantage thesis was popularized by those trying to move away from cultural theories and instead focus on ‘situational characteristics of ethnic groups that inform their business participation’ (2010: 66). But I was attempting to understand how culture is invoked among respondents as an explanation for Korean immigrant entrepreneurship and how these responses, to draw from Min’s rejoinder here, demonstrate ‘similarities between her informants’ and sociological interpretations.’ Therefore, I was not reifying culture, i.e., treating it as inherent or static; rather I was trying to find out whether my respondents thought culture – however they conceptualized it – informed Korean business ‘success’.7

My Critical Sociology article showed that respondents believed Korean immigrants were disadvantaged and in turn, championed Koreans as determined, self-sufficient, generous with co-ethnics, and entrepreneurial. Consistent with colorblind racism, then, respondents minimized the role that their institutions played in shaping Korean immigrant business patterns and claimed that Korean immigrants overcame their disadvantage through cultural means (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Like Min and Park, some respondents did not conceive of Korean culture as inherent but instead treated it as behavioral or adaptive to new circumstances. And also like Min and Park, they did not necessarily claim that Koreans engaged in Anglo-conformity, i.e., that adaptation strategies simply mimicked whites or disowned Korean culture or identity. Indeed, in many cases, it was argued by my respondents that there was something distinctively ‘Korean’ or ‘Asian’ about Korean immigrants that helped them to adjust to new environs. Regardless of how they saw culture – inherent or strategic, neo-white or Asian – most respondents still minimized the role of their own institutions in shaping the economic opportunities of Koreans – even when sitting in their bank or government agency offices. Because most respondents perversely celebrated Korean culture as a source of Koreans’ social mobility
but failed to factor into the equation their institutions as sources of capitalization, I concluded that their concern with immigrant disadvantage was indicative of colorblind racism.

To be fair, both Min and Park go out of their way to make clear that their concentration on Koreans’ adaptation strategies should not be taken as commentaries on other groups, notably African Americans. Min queries, ‘The major question I want to raise to Nopper here is why she labels the social scientists who have provided such interpretations as “colorblind racists” when they never indicated the racial difference in these characteristics helpful to the establishment and operation of small businesses’ (emphasis added). Park states, ‘Culture cannot be reduced to or reified as behavioral characteristics. There is no way to say that only group A has a culture (e.g. ethnic, class, family, or other resource), and not group B.’ To buttress their claims, Min and Park draw from research conducted by Mary Waters and Carol Stack, respectively. For example, Min points out, ‘As Waters (1999) has shown in detail, Caribbean black immigrants, like Asian immigrants, are ready to work hard for lower-paying jobs. Moreover, Asian and Caribbean black immigrants seem to have a higher level of motivation than native-born whites and blacks. There is nothing that remotely resembles any racial ideology in these observations or interpretations.’ Drawing from Stack’s work, Park suggests that a narrow construction of ‘family’ prevents people from noticing adaptation strategies among African Americans: ‘The usual method of arbitrarily accepted definition of the family as nuclear or matrilocal may block one from seeing the world as it exists in very poor communities.’ She precedes this comment by stating, ‘Just like Korean immigrants, as Carol Stack’s All Our Kin (1974) indicated, poor, urban, black families have strong, resilient and informal support networks that cope relatively well in an often hostile environment.’

It seems Min and Park might misunderstand my consideration of the disadvantage thesis and the related significance accorded factors such as motivation and adaptation strategies. Regarding Min, I appreciate motivation, and wish that many of my college students would have more of it. Yet I tend not to focus on it too much sociologically because regardless of how motivation is ‘scientifically measured’, it cannot adequately explain the extreme racial disparities in employment, business ownership, or wealth. In terms of Park’s concerns, I appreciate the complexity of culture and am also bothered by how heterosexist and homophobic constructions of ‘the family’ inform the lens through which many social scientists study economic inequality (see Kim and Duggan 2005; O’Connor 2001). Yet it was the preoccupation with disadvantage and subsequent adaptation strategies that I was critically addressing. Because the disadvantage thesis (perhaps inadvertently) encourages a magnification of adaptation strategies – even strategies that resist certain cultural aspects of Anglo-conformity – I concluded that it was an example of colorblind racism.

I also labeled the disadvantage thesis a colorblind racist approach because the focus on group characteristics, whether imported or developed in a new country in response to marginalization, nevertheless reproduces cultural racism (Bonilla-Silva 2003). Reminiscent of social Darwinism, or what Steinberg (2001: 79) labels ‘the new Darwinism’ – where culture replaces genes as the explanation for group mobility – certain ethnic
groups, particularly Asian immigrants, are depicted as having the cultural and social capacity to adapt to a competitive and hostile environment. Even when we take into consideration some of the structural factors that have impacted African Americans and their social mobility, the focus on adaptation, group characteristics, and behavior nevertheless have greater implications for how we explain socioeconomic stratification in general. Bates (1997: 110) addresses this point as it regards Asian immigrants: ‘Conventional wisdom suggests that immigrant Asian entrepreneurs residing in the United States benefit from their high propensity to help each other … The notion that poor immigrant groups, with the help of group solidarity, could bootstrap their way to economic success by operating small businesses continues to have wide acceptability today.’

Thus, in order to avoid bootstrap explanations of social mobility, which are inherently colorblind (Bonilla-Silva 2003), we need more details about how financial and government institutions engage immigrants after arrival. We also need to explore how institutional actors, in their assessment of different ethnic and racial groups’ business patterns, may ascribe characteristics informed by and promoting hegemonic ideologies about race, culture, and adaptation. Ultimately, this was the purpose of my Critical Sociology article.

Conclusion

In closing, I want to repeat how delighted I am that I had the opportunity to engage two noted Korean American studies scholars whose research I return to again and again. Their rejoinders gave me the opportunity to make more explicit my approach and conclusions as well as provide an alternative account of the role of Korean banks in the early development of post-1965 Korean immigrant entrepreneurship. I understand that spectacles of conflict involving Korean immigrant business owners, most notably the 1992 Los Angeles riots, have made Korean immigrants’ reasons for entering small business and the sources of their capital common foci among a range of people with different motivations for engaging in the debate. Basically, where Koreans get their money is a sensitive and contentious topic that is not always explored well or for ethical reasons. Hopefully our exchange here, while perhaps in conflict over our interpretation of the literature and the characterization of the disadvantage thesis, can forge productive, overlapping lines of inquiry for future research into the sources of Korean business capital.

Notes

1 I also want to thank Dr. David Fasenfest, the editor of Critical Sociology, for allowing me to write a response to Min’s and Park’s rejoinders and for publishing our debate in his journal.
2 Additionally, although not dealt with in this forum, I am concerned with the tendency in the literature to refer to Korean banks, when they are mentioned, as ethnic institutions, which implies that they are internal sources of capitalization and thus somehow unrelated to market relations and state regulation.
To be fair, many scholars, including Min and Park, do rightfully draw our attention to the capital that immigrants bring over from South Korea, whether human capital such as formal education or financial capital in terms of savings. Yet the preoccupation with pre-migrant forms of capital nevertheless helps reinforce a focus on group characteristics as the determining factor shaping adaptation and social mobility. Along with depoliticizing capital transfers and the geopolitical relations between countries that facilitate them (as well as the lack of state regulation that permits people to travel with and purchase businesses with relatively large sums of cash), we also suggest that some immigrants simply ‘import’ their resources and thus imply that there has been no institutional support of immigrants after arrival. And, as I point out elsewhere (Nopper 2009b), ‘the importation thesis reproduces the racist myth of white entitlement. By emphasizing how immigration policies from 1965 onwards have favored skilled immigrants, we inadvertently suggest that post-1965 immigrants – code for immigrants of color – have a competitive edge over earlier waves of white immigrants. Thus, we promote the idea that earlier waves of white immigrants really did earn everything all by themselves.’

My use of the term ‘co-ethnic economic infrastructure’ is not meant to imply that Korean banks and related financial institutions operate outside of the global or local economies, i.e. that they are somehow independent of processes and trends related to global capitalism and inter/national regulations regarding the flow of goods, capital, and verification. Rather, a co-ethnic economic infrastructure targets the economic development of a particular ethnic group.

I would include the source cited by Park in her rejoinder, Ahn et al. (2009), but unfortunately, it is unavailable via an internet search or through the libraries of the universities at which I am a faculty member. The book in which the chapter is featured is marketed on the website of the book publisher, the Korean American Economic Development Center, as purchasable on Amazon.com. The site encourages the visitor to click on a link to ‘Buy this Book,’ but when directed to Amazon.com, a message appears that the book is ‘currently unavailable.’ Attempts to have the chapter ordered through interlibrary services did not work either since I received a message from the library stating that the transaction had been canceled because the book, in another library, was already in use. All of this to say that I was unfortunately unaware of this article nor able to locate a copy when I learned of it from Park’s rejoinder. As such I cannot cite it in the list of studies interviewing Korean bankers since I have been unable to read it.

Along with the data regarding Korean business patterns that I offer in my Critical Sociology article, among immigrants, Koreans have the second highest percentage of business ownership, second to those from Greece (Fairlie 2008: 11). Additionally, between 1996 and 2007, Koreans accounted for the fourth highest number of new business owners per month and the highest rate of business formation among immigrants (Fairlie 2008: 19). As an aside of sorts, but related to patterns of Korean business, I want to thank Min and Park for not pointing out an obvious gaffe in my Critical Sociology article, which, as seen on page 66, was my mentioning of Korean business ‘sales and receipts of nearly $46 million.’ I meant to write $46 billion. Oh what a difference a letter makes!

Park argues in her rejoinder that ‘both Nopper as critic and the scholars she criticized are at fault in making an illogical argument in which they equate high rates of self-employment with immigrant success in the small business realm, as well as with achieving upward social and economic mobility in the USA’. While I recognize that Korean immigrants do not always equate small business ownership with ‘success’ (a point explored in my article; see 2010: 71), do have difficult experiences both opening and maintaining firms, do not always receive the same returns on their efforts as others, and do not earn the same net business income as other immigrant groups (Fairlie 2008: 25), I perceive ‘success’ in relative terms. Considering that the disadvantage thesis takes as its point of departure the lack of employment opportunities in the primary labor market, I consider Koreans being able to open
a small business and maintain it as a source of income – as well as assets (Hao 2004: 534–5) – to be a much better alternative to unemployment in the primary labor market than experienced by some racial minorities, notably African Americans.

8 Scholars have addressed how this claim regarding (black) immigrant motivation, has been used to promote negative images of African Americans and to blame them for their economic patterns (Pierre 2004; Steinberg 2001).

References


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Please note that the following sentence (p.4, first full paragraph, lines 1–3) is missing the word ‘banks’:

‘In sum, several Korean helped finance the Korean export-import industry as well as institutionalize US-based Korean immigrant financial activities in service to South Korea’s economy.’

The text should read as follows:

‘In sum, several Korean banks helped finance the Korean export-import industry as well as institutionalize US-based Korean immigrant financial activities in service to South Korea’s economy.’

SAGE wishes to apologize to the author for this omission.