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**Indicators of Entrepreneurial Success among
Business Immigrants in Canada**

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Abstract: This paper seeks to explain the business performance of entrepreneurs who entered Canada through the Business Immigration Program. The study draws upon a detailed face-to-face questionnaire with 90 entrepreneurs in Vancouver, a third from Hong Kong, a third from Taiwan and a third from Korea. As suggested by the mixed-embeddedness model of immigrant entrepreneurialism, economic actions were closely regulated by the state. But opportunities were also prescribed by a position they perceived to be precarious in the regional market. Overall, business performance was weak, especially considering the significant pre-migration resources held by entrepreneurs. Some of the factors regarded as prompting entrepreneurialism were also significant in shaping business outcomes. Human capital and some class resources influenced business success. Consistent with European research, the ethnic enclave economy imposed a penalty on outcomes. Inter-ethnic variation was significant, with Korean-Canadians by far the most successful of the three groups because they disproportionately sought mainstream markets. In addition they were less involved in transnational business activities, which seemed to compete with, rather than complement, Canadian enterprise.

Keywords: Entrepreneur immigrants, business performance, ethnic enclave economy, transnationalism, Vancouver

Indicators of Entrepreneurial Success among Business Immigrants in Canada

In recent years significant theoretical development has occurred in the research on immigrant entrepreneurship. Explanations for entrepreneurship range from the characteristics and resources of particular ethnic groups to broader contextual circumstances, that is from supply features to demand conditions (Light and Gold 2000; Kloosterman and Rath 2003). For our sample of business people the fact of entrepreneurship is a given, a requirement of immigration itself, permitting household entry to Canada within the entry class of business immigrant. With entrepreneur status granted upon arrival, the objective of this paper is not to analyse the factors leading to business formation, but to determine what shapes business outcomes. Are factors that have been conventionally identified as directing immigrants toward entrepreneurship, such as national variation and ethnic and class resources, also relevant in shaping their business success? What is the role of marketing strategies? And how do transnational business ties contribute to economic outcomes? While the status of business immigrant certainly introduces some particularities to the discussion, the economic performance of these entrepreneurs may be generalisable in part to other immigrant groups in other settings.

The paper begins by reviewing some of the principal explanations of immigrant entrepreneurialism. Following a discussion of the literature on economic outcomes, we turn to a sample of entrepreneur immigrants in Vancouver, assess the performance of their business ventures, and consider reasons for their relative success or failure.

The Story so Far: From Middleman Minorities to Mixed Embeddedness

Kloosterman and Rath (2003: 3) have identified more than 1700 publications on immigrant entrepreneurship, so inevitably any review will both over-simplify the diversity of the field and also suggest greater cohesion than actually exists. In addition our interest is to highlight research that is more relevant for the present case study, while still positioning that empirical study more broadly.

As in other fields of social science, theoretical accounts variously specify human agency and enveloping structure in explanatory accounts of entrepreneurialism (Rath and Kloosterman 2000). Neoclassical economists emphasise models of individual actor agency related to a bundle of human capital attributes (Borjas 1990). Such analysis often pays insufficient attention to differential levels of entrepreneurship between minorities from different national origins, and economic sociologists have been drawn to the group resources derived from particular ethnic and class embeddedness (Light

1972, 1984). The emphasis on ethnic resources was much invigorated by the work on social capital, the supportive elements of trust, networking and mutual aid available within homogenous minorities, and shown to be a significant factor, for example, in the development of enterprise among the Cuban population in Miami (Portes and Bach 1985; Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). Indeed Light and Gold (2000: 94) claim that “The contribution of social networks to entrepreneurship is the most important research discovery in the last generation”. Such networks are sources of business inputs including financing from family members and rotating credit associations (Park 1997; Ng 1999) and labour from co-ethnic and family sources. But ethnic resources are not without their shortcomings. Family obligations can prepare the way for abuses and exploitation (Ong 1999; Waters 2002); as Sarah Mahler (1995: 225) has noted, one should be cautious not to romanticise ethnic solidarity, when disloyalty and betrayal are also part of the record.

Class resources have become increasingly salient with the increasing international migration of skilled workers, professionals and capitalists. In a study of Indo-Canadian entrepreneurs, Marger (1989) determined that class resources were integral to business formation, while Li (1992) reached the same conclusion among Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs. The assets they brought to Canada permitted business start-ups and corporate activity, replacing the older model of blocked mobility resulting from racial exclusion. Such resources include finance capital, human capital and professional or entrepreneurial experience, which in principle have a global range of applications. The business immigration programs in Canada, Australia and New Zealand are predicated upon the universality and portability of such assets between countries.

Entrepreneurship takes place in economic and social settings, and most accounts have incorporated these contexts as part of an opportunity structure that may be enabling or constraining in employment options. Examination of groups in isolation runs the risk of criticism as overly voluntarist, or as engaging in cultural essentialism. Bonacich’s (1973) early treatment of middlemen minorities identified the role of sojourner groups like Chinese or Jews, but these groups also commonly experienced exclusion and racism in the societies in which they traded. Indeed such blocked mobility in the mainstream society is frequently invoked as a pre-condition for minority self-employment (Collins 2003). Li (1979), for example, stressed the racialised environment in the first half of the twentieth century that excluded Chinese-Canadians from the professions and encouraged them to select self-employment. Other disadvantages in the labour market include language difficulties, lack of local experience and, of increasing significance, non-recognition of overseas credentials that exclude immigrants from skilled labour markets. Such blocked mobility continues to encourage some groups, including Koreans (Park 1997; Min and Bozorgmehr 2003), to see self-

employment as a preferred occupational strategy. Like Li (1992), more recent research is downplaying the role of racial exclusion from markets (Lo *et al.* 2002: 8), while noting the existence of other disadvantages.

Other market contexts have been noted by Waldinger (1996), including the process of niche succession as immigrant groups find market opportunities vacated by earlier minorities. Niche development implies a break-out from immersion in the ethnic enclave economy to 'mainstream' markets (Engelen 2001). The market of course is dynamic and some authors have attempted to identify the recent growth of ethnic entrepreneurialism in western nations with post-Fordist trends toward vertical disintegration in the economy, creating opportunities for flexible and small-scale business start-ups (Jones *et al.* 2000). The process of contracting out extends to the household itself, and especially in the highly polarised labour markets of global cities, the emergence of highly paid households has created opportunities for a lower tier of small firms to provide household services, including cleaning, landscaping, domestic service, security and food preparation. Such opportunities in global cities like New York and Los Angeles have permitted entry by ethnic entrepreneurs (Sassen 1991). The existence of large immigrant populations in global cities also enlarges the scale of the ethnic enclave economy and the options for formal and informal entrepreneurialism (Light 2000). Informal practices, evading various state regulations, create jobs and firms that otherwise might not exist, as informal activity provides economic actors with a competitive edge (Kloosterman *et al.* 1998).

The issue of informalisation introduces the role of the state as partial overseer of the immigrant economy. An important theoretical extension to the contexts of self-employment has been consideration of the state as enabler or constrainer of immigrant enterprise (Rath 2000). This institutional approach stresses international differences, notably between the United States and Western Europe (Kloosterman 2000). The American model of low wages and relatively unregulated markets provides favourable conditions for business entry and for self-employment as a means to raise wage levels. In contrast, the Western European model of greater protection to labour, more generous welfare programmes and a more regulated market creates barriers to self-employment in the formal economy. This theoretical innovation identifies a double or mixed embeddedness confronting the immigrant entrepreneur who is positioned not only among co-ethnics but also in a more abstract but no less salient regulatory environment that includes the critical dimension of immigration status. The state's authority to confer legal status powerfully shapes the immigrant's daily life-world, including economic behaviour (Mountz *et al.* 2002). As we shall see, for entrepreneurs who have

landed in Canada with business immigrant status, the regulatory arm of the state is a paramount reality, a factor compelling either formal adherence or, for some, informal evasion.

Outcomes: The performance of Immigrant Enterprise

While the verdict is not clear-cut, there is a tendency for judgments about the success of immigrant entrepreneurship to line up with the institutional divide between American and Western European welfare states. The powerful myths of assimilation and the melting pot provide an ideological mantle encouraging a more positive assessment of immigrant enterprise in the United States, while in Western Europe, the segmented and commonly disadvantaged status of immigrants have frequently led to less sanguine conclusions.

The apparently strong performance of the Cuban ethnic economy in Miami presented a template of success for immigrant entrepreneurialism and the ethnic economy more generally for both owners and employees, and inspired confidence in the strength of ethnic resources (Portes and Bach 1985). This finding was extended in a study which showed the more favourable earnings of the self-employed relative to comparable co-ethnics employed in the mainstream economy among Cuban, Korean, Chinese and Japanese Americans (Portes and Zhou 1992). While dissenting findings have been reported (Light and Gold 2000: 59-63), there seems to be a tendency to highlight the positive, mirroring perhaps the optimism of immigrant entrepreneurs themselves. For example, while Light and Gold (2000: 127) report ‘cannibalistic competition’ between immigrant entrepreneurs they have little to say about its consequences. So too among Korean entrepreneurs in New York, Park (1997) claims slow up-market movement, while also citing frequent business failures and marginal returns. A census-based study that included Miami Cubans as well as Chinese and Koreans in New York and Los Angeles concluded that ‘ethnic economies generate only fragile benefits’ (Logan *et al.* 2003: 380).

There are clearly differentials among immigrant groups in their business strategies and economic outcomes, just as there are in the propensity to seek self-employment. American studies of Cubans, Koreans and Chinese probably exaggerate the benefits of self-employment relative to other ethnic groups (Light and Gold 2000: 60). In general, and without introducing any controls, self-employed immigrants in Canada had higher average incomes than the native-born self-employed in 1995 and also exceeded the average income of the entire immigrant population (Hiebert 2003). These data suggest that ‘self-employment is a vital opportunity for economic advancement’ (2003: 52). However, Li (1994) showed from earlier census data that immigrants from non-European origins

were more likely to enter self-employment in sectors of the economy that were less rewarding than the niches of European immigrants, while Teixeira (1998) suggested that the latter group were more likely than the former to see self-employment as a ladder to upward mobility.

In contrast western European studies are commonly less nuanced in their interpretations. The long-standing view of immigrants as a replacement population operating in marginalised economic sectors has carried over to the assessment of immigrant entrepreneurialism. Self-employment is seen as a defensive reaction following de-industrialisation and its success is heavily compromised by its location in declining markets. European authors commonly regard ethnic entrepreneurship “as a form of disguised unemployment” (Light and Gold 2000: 196). Jones *et al.* (2000) see the ethnic enclave economy as a site of few rewards: ‘the local ethnic space provides lean pickings for the proliferation of tiny and often precarious firms within its stifling confines’ (2000: 43). They are not persuaded by the argument of supportive social capital within the enclave: ethnic bonding is more properly ethnic bondage (Barrett *et al.* 2003: 114). Specialised niches offer only ‘sectoral imprisonment (2003: 112) and ‘appallingly high individual failure rates’ (Jones *et al.* 2000: 47), especially when they have been abandoned as unproductive by other groups. These authors reach the important conclusion that successful immigrant entrepreneurialism necessitates a break-out into non-ethnic and non-local markets in growth sectors of the economy. Such a strategy requires class rather than ethnic resources. This British experience is projected more broadly by Kloosterman (2000) to the European welfare states where a more regulated institutional structure ‘funnels immigrant entrepreneurs towards sunset activities in vacancy-chain businesses, competing fiercely in shrinking markets with little hope of progressing beyond mere economic survival’ (2000: 104). A response that maintains a competitive advantage for the business is to engage in informal practices that evade state surveillance (Kloosterman *et al.* 1998). We will see there is evidence that some immigrant entrepreneurs in Vancouver share characteristics with this gloomy scenario.

The Canadian Business Immigration Programme (BIP)

Some 30 countries run business immigration programmes, indicating the resolve of the state to play actively in the globalisation game and attract footloose skilled and entrepreneurial migrants who will prime economic development in a new land in return for citizenship rights (Ley 2003). Canada has played this game with some success, in part through lenient selection criteria. Between 1983 and 2001, over 310,000 immigrants landed in Canada through the BIP; in contrast the Australian programme recruited 91,000 and the US programme, with steeper entry requirements, fewer than

6,000 (Wong 2003). The BIP was initiated with an entrepreneurial stream in 1978 that requires management of a business. Canada added an investor stream in 1986 where more passive investment in venture capital projects was possible. A smaller third stream facilitates the entry of the self-employed who either have large financial resources or have a particular occupational status such as entertainers or professional athletes. This paper is concerned with the entrepreneurial track, the largest of the three.

Past work emphasised the ethnic and class resources that are associated with this form of entrepreneurship (Marger 2001; Wong 2002). In addition the role of the state is clearly a major force. Business plans, business experience and financial assets had to pass muster with Canadian immigration officers overseas prior to permission being granted for entry to Canada. Upon arrival, immigrants have to complete a landing form in which they state their intended occupation. Subsequently, the state prescribes the level of business investment, typically Cdn \$150,000 in the Vancouver region, and the 'terms and conditions' of business assessment. Within two years of landing, entrepreneurs are required to own an enterprise they are actively managing with at least one (non-family) Canadian employee.¹ Progress is monitored, with a requirement for regular reports to government agents and a final assessment of the business to ascertain whether the terms and conditions could be removed, and the household be granted permission to move along the path to citizenship. This Foucauldian-like monitoring and surveillance by the state unambiguously identifies a model of mixed embeddedness.

By far the largest grouping of business immigrants has been drawn from Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea; Hong Kong accounted for almost a third of landings through the BIP between 1980 and 2001, and together the three territories contributed 55 percent of the Canadian total. Korean and Chinese ethnicity are invariably associated with high levels of self-employment more generally. Koreans appear at or near the top of a ranking of minorities with the highest level of self-employment in Canada (Hiebert 2003) and the United States (Light and Gold 2000; Min and Bozorgmehr 2003). In the United States, Taiwanese levels are well above the average, though the Hong Kong rate is somewhat below it (Light and Gold 2000; Min and Bozorgmehr 2003); surprisingly the Canadian census suggests that self-employment among ethnic Chinese immigrants is below the foreign-born average (Hiebert 2003). Nonetheless, the large size of the ethnic Chinese population in Toronto and Vancouver has led to substantial ethnic entrepreneurship. By 1997, over 6,000 Chinese enterprises were listed in Toronto ethnic directories, while 634 companies were large enough to be included in

¹ In response to programme criticism this time horizon was extended to three years in 2003. But the sample in this paper all faced the two-year limit

Dun and Bradstreet's Toronto directory (Preston *et al.* 2003). The capitalisation required for this type of economic venture has encouraged Li (1992) to see the role played by class as well as ethnic resources in Chinese-Canadian entrepreneurialism. Some authors identify a two-tiered system, with well-endowed immigrants from Hong Kong and Taiwan engaged in capital and skill intensive activity for a broader market, with a lower tier of less successful retail and personal service activity aimed at the enclave economy (Preston *et al.* 2003: 220).

Turning specifically to outcomes from the BIP, achievement has been judged according to quantitative and qualitative criteria. Annual statistics from Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) present an impressive scale of investment and job creation. In the province of British Columbia (including Vancouver), the entrepreneur stream was credited with business investment of over a billion dollars between 1990 and 1998, with the creation or maintenance of more than 25,000 jobs (CIC 1999). But these imposing statistics are challenged by a data base of tax returns from business immigrants. Data from the 1995 tax year, released in a special compendium file, reveal that business immigrants to British Columbia in all three streams were declaring low returns on self-employment. Statistics are available by year of landing for each year since 1980, producing a set of 16 annual cohorts of business immigrants in the 1995 tax file. The median value for average net taxable earnings from self-employment among these 16 cohorts is extraordinarily low, a little under \$9,200 a year (Ley 2003). A separate analysis by Hiebert (2003) of the same data base compared self-employment earnings by detailed immigration status for all of Canada. In 1995 returns, the average self-employment earnings for the entrepreneur stream alone were only \$4,700. In fact self-employed refugees declared higher earnings from their business and in terms of overall income, an extraordinary outcome in light of the differential class resources of each group.

Qualitative results from interviews with entrepreneurs in the BIP lead to the same bleak conclusion. Early research was more optimistic about economic outcomes, including Marger and Hoffman's (1992) study of business immigrants in the entrepreneur stream who landed in Ontario in 1986-7. But interviews with more recent arrivals have been much less positive. Wong and Ng (1998) found that business migrants in Vancouver primarily from Hong Kong and Taiwan generated low returns and intense competition within the enclave economy. Woo (1998) and Ley (1999) found similar outcomes among a small sample in both the entrepreneur and investor streams, as well as the salience of the state's regulations in shaping business decision-making. Most important, a short mail-in survey, completed by over 300 immigrant entrepreneurs in the Vancouver region, was undertaken for the Government of Canada (Glover and Sim 2002). The terms and conditions of sample respondents had been lifted in the previous four years, indicating acceptance by CIC officials of their

business record. The study revealed that 44 percent of respondents had subsequently closed the business, and less than half of the remainder expected to make a profit in the year following the survey. Barriers to business were identified as weak economic and market conditions by 73 percent of respondents, followed by limited social networks and connections (54 percent), lack of government assistance (52 percent), different ways of conducting business (45 percent) and language obstacles (43 percent), a mix of the market's opportunity structure, the lack of bridging social capital, the regulatory environment, and blocked mobility due to human capital limitations. A weak market was also the leading reason for closing or selling the business. Of seven reasons for termination, discrimination was mentioned least, supporting Hiebert's (2003) and Li's (1992) judgement that in the current phase of immigrant entrepreneurialism, this form of blocked mobility is of dwindling importance. This survey, while valuable, was too short to cover a number of salient issues. Our own survey, with 106 questions, was able to attain more detailed resolution.

The Sample of BIP Entrepreneurs

Almost two-thirds of the business immigrants to British Columbia between 1980 and 2000, some 63,000 in total, originated in Hong Kong or Taiwan, with South Korea in third rank. Consequently these were the three national groups selected for interview. We sought respondents, living in Greater Vancouver, who had landed in Canada through the entrepreneur stream of the BIP during the 1990s and whose terms and conditions had been removed by Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Resources permitted 90 interviews to be conducted, with 30 households from each of the three groups. In addition three two-hour focus groups were organised with an additional 6-8 entrepreneurs at each meeting. Both interviews and focus groups were conducted in the first four months of 2002 by trained co-ethnic members in the language of choice for respondents. Focus group members were secured through an NGO and a government agency, both of whom offered services to business immigrants, while interviews were secured through snowball samples in Greater Vancouver with varied entry points. Of the 106 questions in the questionnaire, we discuss those that defined, and sought to account for, the success of the business ventures undertaken by respondents to meet the terms and conditions of their entrepreneur immigrant status.

Our 90 respondents had been living in Canada for an average of between 8 and 9 years, ample time to have established a business, had terms and conditions lifted, and to be well settled. At arrival the mean age of the head of household was 41 years, and the family comprised two parents and two children. Almost a third of respondents were women, indicating their active role in business

management, often in the absence of a husband who worked overseas. The human capital of the group was impressive. They had accumulated an average of 14 years of pre-migration business experience as owners (77 percent) or senior managers, while 42 percent had at least a bachelor's degree. English language skills, however, were poorly developed, and only 8 per cent had used English in their own homes. Available financial capital was substantial. All BIP entrepreneurs landing in British Columbia had declared average assets of over a million dollars to immigration officers in the first half of the 1990s, and respondents cited a median level of \$400,000 available for use in Canada, with more off-shore. Typically they lived in new houses with a value of over \$500,000, and not infrequently, of over \$1 million. The class resources available for use were significant.

Ethnic resources were also present. The Chinese-Canadian population in Greater Vancouver exceeds 350,000, and is particularly concentrated in the City of Vancouver and the suburb of Richmond, offering co-ethnic enclave markets for entrepreneurs. In contrast, the Korean-Canadian population in the 1990s was under 20,000 and widely dispersed geographically, providing a lesser bank of ethnic social capital.

The First Business

It was the first business venture in Canada that had led to the removal of terms and conditions by CIC and consequently it was the focus of our attention. The mean date of opening the business was mid-1994, less than a year after landing. The sample was not well-informed about economic prospects in Canada; on average they knew only 'a little' about economic opportunities upon arrival. Information was subsequently mobilised within ethnic networks from friends (59 per cent) and family (23 per cent). Limited use was made of more formal sources.

Economic conditions in Greater Vancouver were a surprise to over 70 per cent of the entrepreneurs, and in every case the discovery was an unpleasant one, as the opportunity structure for business was far bleaker than anticipated. Three-fifths encountered immediate obstacles to their business plans. Barriers were wide-ranging, including the shape of market demand and the state of public regulation: a small and weak regional market was identified by 45 per cent, business costs by 24 per cent, taxation levels by 24 per cent, varied regulations by 21 per cent, and a range of other barriers by 33 per cent. Weak economic conditions also emerged as the major impediment identified by entrepreneurs in Glover and Sim's (2002) survey of BIP entrepreneurs.

Adjustments occurred. Facing uncertainty respondents cut their planned investment by \$25,000 or 17 per cent. Second, a significant reconfiguration of economic sectors took place, as 40 per cent of entrepreneurs tore up their business plans. Those with pre-migration experience in manufacturing, construction and the import-export trade moved into other sectors, notably retailing and the food business, so that at opening, 57 per cent of entrepreneurs selected retailing or the restaurant, coffee- and tea-house sector, with another 16 per cent in retail services such as dry cleaners and travel agencies. This shift had a great deal to do with public regulation. Repeatedly we heard of the barriers to manufacturing and construction activities from a labyrinth of unfamiliar environmental and labour codes, licensing and inspections. These introduced not only costs, but as important, delays, for respondents were legally mandated to have a business up and running and ready for assessment within two years. Retailing and food sales offered some clear advantages. Existing small businesses were available for purchase and could be stocked for rapid opening. The market was local and did not require complex negotiations with distant buyers and suppliers. Family labour could be used to shave operating costs. Most important, there was an immediate cash flow, a demonstration of business activity. But there was also the downside of working not only in an unfamiliar business culture, but also in a new sector, with 57 per cent of business people opening an enterprise unrelated to their pre-migration field of experience. Among the sample, a graphic artist became a retailer of children's clothes, a garment manufacturer opened a restaurant, and a chemical engineer bought a flower shop.

A third adjustment was the classic solution to blocked mobility, a turning toward the ethnic economy. Upon arrival 46 per cent of entrepreneurs had planned to include their native language in business operations, either alone or mixed with English. At business opening, mother tongue usage rose to 58 per cent. Across all 90 entrepreneurs, it was estimated that 25-50 per cent of the market was co-ethnic. A fourth adjustment was informalisation. One informant stated that 'English is very important...Many other Taiwanese who don't know the language, they pay someone else to remove the conditions for them'. For a fee ranging from \$25,000 to as much as \$100,000 nominal ownership of an existing company could be signed over to an entrepreneur for the purposes of terms and conditions removal. Once terms had been lifted, formal ownership would revert to the original owner. This irregular route was usually arranged ahead of time by immigration consultants but could readily be found by migrants themselves. Several respondents had lost large sums of money through versions that required pre-assigned investment in enterprises that did not exist, or existed only as shell companies. This practice was acknowledged by a number of respondents; a few had used it themselves. One man even considered it to be the strategy of a majority of co-ethnics: 'Over 90 per

cent of Taiwanese entrepreneurs are paying someone to get their conditions removed'. We can be sure of the existence, though not the extent, of informal practices.

A number of explanations of entrepreneurialism may be recognised in the strategies of these BIP entrepreneurs. Both ethnic and class resources are deployed in setting up a business. The opportunity structure of the regional market was daunting to entrepreneurs unfamiliar with local conditions and whose mobility was blocked by language problems and uncertainty with local business conditions. Their opportunities were also strongly shaped by the regulatory constraints facing BIP entrepreneurs. They made adjustments including a reduction of investment level, redefinition of business sectors, greater recourse to the ethnic economy and in some instances take-up of informal practices.

Business Performance

We move now to a consideration of the performance of the first business. Half the sample (52 percent) bought an existing enterprise. After two years, around the time of CIC assessment, employment was modest, but nonetheless exceeded the critical mandated threshold of one non-family employee. The median business had two full-time workers and one part-time worker, including one family member. With a couple of very successful operations employing 60 and 65 staff, the total non-family employment across the 90 firms was 477, with total investment declared to be over \$25 million. Economic development at this scale would certainly be regarded very favourably by the state.

But entrepreneurs themselves were less sanguine about their achievements. On a five-point scale of satisfaction, the mean rating of business satisfaction was 2.94, almost exactly at the mid-point, and corresponding to an evaluation that they were doing "OK". Further questioning showed scores on the negative or dissatisfied side of the scale for taxes (3.73), profits (3.38), competition (3.34), costs (3.29), hours of work (3.22) and regulations (3.11). Falling on the positive or satisfied side of the scale were assessments of customers, employees and suppliers. Many operations were economically marginal. Net revenues the year terms and conditions had been lifted, disclosed by 59 percent of respondents, revealed mean net revenue of only \$20,000, with the more representative median figure, *zero*, as many business owners were unable even to extract a full salary for themselves. They removed as much of a partial salary, sometimes nothing at all, as the business would bear before losing money. A simpler revenue measure was devised according to whether the business made money, lost money or broke even, and with this simplification the response rate rose to 87 per cent. In the year terms and conditions were lifted by CIC, 42 per cent of operations had a

positive net balance, 27 per cent broke even and 31 per cent lost money. Half the businesses (48 per cent) were subsequently sold, on average within a year, invariably due to their weak performance.

Indicators of Success

A series of potential factors were considered as indicators of business success: human capital at arrival; class resources at arrival; ethnic resources; locational market strategy; business type; country of origin; and planned length of residence as a proxy for transnational intent. These variables were cross-tabulated with the two measures of business performance, first, the overall satisfaction of entrepreneurs with their first business and, second, net revenues (positive, negative or break even) the year that terms and conditions were removed (approximately two years after the business was launched). With a non-random sample, significance tests are inappropriate, so that a more interpretative assessment of the strength of relationships is employed.

Human capital at arrival

Pre-migration human capital characteristics have been shown to have demonstrable effects upon business strategies in Canada (Froschauer 2001). Their deployment is equally associated with business success. Self-assessed English competence measured on a five-point scale was strongly associated with satisfaction with the performance of the business, though less so with net business revenue (Table 1). Over half of the entrepreneurs who declared their English to be good or very good at landing were satisfied with the outcomes of their first business; in contrast over half of those who rated their English as 'almost none' were dissatisfied. Educational levels were strongly associated with both performance indicators (Table 2). Three out of four university-educated entrepreneurs claimed positive revenues, compared to only 12 per cent of those with high school completion or less. So low scores on these human capital factors which are commonly regarded in the literature as promoting self-employment by blocking mobility to other occupations, have an additional effect in determining the degree of success within the entrepreneurial economy itself.

Table 1. *English competence and business performance*

Satisfaction with business success	English competence at landing			
	v. good/ good	fair	poor	almost none
very satisf./ satisfied	56%	46%	32%	30%
OK	31	25	45	15
dissatisf. / v. dissatisfied	13	29	23	55
Net revenues				
positive	43%	39%	57%	32%
break-even	43	28	19	24
negative	14	33	24	44

Table 2. *Educational level and business performance*

Satisfaction with business success	Educational level at landing		
	university	college/ trade school	elem/high school
very satisf./ satisfied	50%	29%	32%
OK	34	17	32
dissatisf. / v. dissatisfied	16	54	36
Net revenues			
positive	75%	29%	12%
break-even	13	24	46
negative	12	47	42

Class resources at arrival

Numerous authors have identified the importance of class resources in immigrant entrepreneurialism (Marger 2001, Wong 2002). While such resources include human capital, an additional factor is the level of financial capital available for use. Upon arrival in Canada in the mid 1990s the median amount was \$400,000, with a third of the respondents citing over \$500,000, and

additional funds off-shore in many cases. But despite this variation in deployable capital, no strong relationship could be detected with business success; indeed, there was a tendency in the data for better endowed households to perform less well (Table 3). It seems as if above a certain minimum threshold additional funds did not increase the prospect of positive achievements.

Table 3. *Available capital and business performance*

Satisfaction with business success	Available capital in Canada		
	Over \$500,000	\$250-500,000	Under \$250,000
very satisf./ satisfied	28%	48%	38%
OK	32	29	19
dissatisf. / v. dissatisfied	40	23	43
Net revenues			
positive	32%	43%	47%
break-even	32	29	20
negative	36	28	33

Use of ethnic resources

There is considerable difference of opinion in the assessment of ethnic resources in the literature. Buoyed by the early work in the Miami Cuban economy and the generally laudatory evaluation of ethnic social capital, American authors in particular have been appreciative of the role of ethnic resources in self-employment strategies. In contrast, European research has referred not to ethnic bonding but to ethnic bondage in assessing economic performance (Barrett *et al.* 2003). We have seen that the Vancouver BIP entrepreneurs engaged ethnic networks in securing business information and in marketing, with considerable use of the mother tongue in business. The consequences for business success, however, are disappointing (Table 4). Enterprises where the working language was exclusively English were more likely to register satisfactory outcomes than those where the working language was mixed or solely an Asian mother tongue. Pointing in the same direction, though less strongly, was a similar penalty when customers were not exclusively English-speaking. The implication is that participation in the ethnic economy constrained business performance.

Location

There has been relatively limited work on the location of businesses, though reference to an ethnic enclave economy generally (Portes and Bach 1985), though not always (Logan *et al.* 2003), implies spatial clustering. In this study, location emerged as an important variable. Firms within Vancouver or Richmond, the areas of highest ethnic Chinese concentration, were notably less successful than businesses located elsewhere (Table 5). Both cities included more losing than gaining businesses and generated much less business satisfaction; in contrast in the rest of Greater Vancouver there was a large majority of firms with positive revenues. Differences related to location were much sharper than the effect of business language (Table 4), leading to a conclusion that the spatial concentration of the ethnic economy added an extra penalty to entrepreneurs. Interviews revealed market saturation within the enclaves, with intense competition and significant business failure. This finding agrees with a Canadian-British comparative study showing that South Asian firms did much better when they were located outside ethnic enclaves and were less sensitive to local markets (Jones *et al.* 2000).

Table 4. *Business language and business performance*

Satisfaction with business success	Business language	
	English only	Other
very satisf./ satisfied	41%	31%
OK	31	18
dissatisf. / v. dissatisfied	28	51
Net revenues		
positive	45%	31%
break-even	27	33
negative	28	36

Table 5. *Location and business performance*

Satisfaction with business success	Municipality		
	Vancouver	Richmond	Others
very satisf./ satisfied	29%	30%	53%
OK	33	22	28
dissatisf. / v. dissatisfied	38	48	19
Net revenues			
positive	25%	26%	62%
break-even	21	42	24
negative	54	32	14

Industrial sector

In light of the heavy movement into retailing among immigrants we might have expected that weak economic outcomes would be associated with retailing and food services where competition could be the fiercest. But in fact there was a slight tendency for retail and restaurant operations to have better outcomes than the other major industrial categories of personal services, manufacturing, construction, and import-export activities. Also unexpected was the effect of entrepreneurs shifting their economic sector upon arrival in Canada. While it would have been anticipated that their lack of experience in their new venture would jeopardise their outcomes, in fact these flexible entrepreneurs were more satisfied and more successful with their operations (Table 6).

Table 6. *Change in industrial sector and business performance*

Satisfaction with business success	Change in sector	
	Yes	No
very satisf./ satisfied	50%	27%
OK	30	24
dissatisf. / v. dissatisfied	20	49
Net revenues		
positive	50%	34%
break-even	30	22
negative	20	44

Country of origin

The best predictor of business success was country of origin (Table 7). Among Korean entrepreneurs, 66 per cent were satisfied with the performance of their business while only 3 per cent one were dissatisfied. In contrast large numbers of migrants originating in Hong Kong and Taiwan were dissatisfied. The same strong tendency emerged for business revenues. While almost all Koreans reported a net profit (a median value of \$35,000), between a third and a half of Hong Kong and Taiwanese ventures suffered losses, and median revenues were zero.

Table 7. *Country of origin and business performance*

Satisfaction with business success	Country of origin		
	Korea	Hong Kong	Taiwan
very satisf./ satisfied	66%	30%	23%
OK	31	27	27
dissatisf. / v. dissatisfied	3	43	50
Net revenues			
positive	86%	10%	41%
break-even	9	45	22
negative	5	45	37

The superior performance of the Korean-origin entrepreneurs was surprising for several reasons. First, with a small and dispersed ethnic population one might have expected much lower sources of social capital than were available in the institutionally complete enclaves of the ethnic Chinese population. Second, the Koreans had less exposure to English than entrepreneurs from Hong Kong, though more than the Taiwanese. Third, they had to make the largest sectoral adjustments, as 87 per cent opened a business in the retail-restaurant sector in Greater Vancouver, while only 16 per cent had worked in this area in Korea, leaving them the least experienced group. What they did have, however, was superiority in educational achievement, with 80 percent attaining at least a bachelor's degree, much higher than the other two groups.

But the key distinction was in marketing strategy. From the beginning the Korean entrepreneurs planned to work the mainstream market, a pattern that has been noted elsewhere (Lo *et al.* 2002). In every case, their business plans upon landing envisaged that English would be the

business language, despite their weak facility, unlike the other groups where English shared equal stature with the Cantonese and Mandarin spoken in the large Chinese-Canadian enclaves in Vancouver. As a result their business locations were widely scattered over the metropolitan area, and it was their success relative to the more enclave-bound Chinese and Taiwanese that led to location emerging as a predictor of business success. With their dispersed locations in non-enclave districts, the Koreans were the most likely to identify language problems as an obstacle to success, but nonetheless they persevered. In the year that terms and conditions were lifted over 80 per cent of Korean enterprises turned a profit, compared with 40 percent of Taiwanese and only 10 per cent of Hong Kong businesses (Table 7).

The transnational motif

Wong (2002) and Tseng (1995) have pointed to the growing importance of trans-Pacific trading relations for ethnic Chinese entrepreneurs living on the West Coast of North America. These linkages, however, take several forms, and not all of them are beneficial for immigrant enterprises in Canada. Amongst our respondents, there was marked inter-ethnic variation in transnational economic activity. While 48 per cent of Taiwanese entrepreneurs maintained business linkages with Taiwan, similar ties were sustained by 28 per cent of former Hong Kong nationals, but by no Koreans. Of the three ethno-cultural groups, Korean-Canadians were also more likely to be currently self-employed, more likely to have their business as their major revenue stream, and more likely to have the highest share of their income earned in Canada. The Koreans in short gave the strongest evidence of economic embeddedness in Canada. For transnational business commitments may compete with economic energy expended in Canada. Findings from Glover and Sim's (2002) large sample of BIP entrepreneurs in Vancouver, two-thirds of them from Hong Kong and Taiwan, showed that 44 per cent had sold their first business (close to the 48 per cent in our survey). Among this group, 38 per cent stated that the reason for selling their business in Greater Vancouver was that they could secure better business opportunities in their home country. No doubt that figure is considerably larger if one were to include households who have already left Canada to pursue such opportunities – and we know that with sustained return migration there are upwards of 200,000 residents of Hong Kong with Canadian passports (Ley and Kobayashi 2002).

One measure of transnational intent is how long households expected to stay in Canada when they landed. Those with short-term settlement plans of less than six years (30 percent of respondents) were likely intending to gain citizenship and perhaps see through a child's education before returning to their homeland, where they would meanwhile maintain business and other linkages. We might

expect such sojourners to have lesser commitment to a business in Canada and indeed those entrepreneurs with short-term plans registered weaker business satisfaction than those with long-term intent – although this relationship was not repeated by net revenues (Table 8).

Table 8. *Settlement intent and business performance*

Satisfaction with business success	Length of planned residence in Canada at landing		
	1-5 years	6-20 years	over 20 years
very satisf./ satisfied	31%	14%	46%
OK	23	72	25
dissatisf. / v. dissatisfied.	46	14	29
Net revenues			
positive	43%	50%	41%
break-even	24	0	31
negative	33	50	27

Transnational gradients then may lead economic entrepreneurialism overseas, and downgrade the importance of Canadian economic activity. In this respect, with the slightest of off-shore economic ties, Korean-Canadians, had the most to gain (and lose) from their Vancouver investment, and would be highly motivated to succeed. It is significant that, of the three groups, Koreans placed the highest share of their available working capital into their Canadian venture.

Conclusion

The entrepreneurs in this study were obligated to open a business soon after landing in Canada, and as such the state stalked their actions. Confronting regular monitoring in addition to the normal range of welfare state regulation, they tended to purchase an existing operation and move into retailing and food preparation in large measure because this sector offered the easiest and fastest start to a venture that was required to demonstrate business vitality within two years. Interviews showed that this constraint introduced considerable anxiety and hardship – there has been reference to the state's 'exploitation' of business immigrants (Skeldon 1994; Froschauer 2001) – and it is notable that immigration reform in 2003 led to an extension of the probationary period to three years. It is not possible to understand the economic behaviour of respondents outside the regulatory arm of the state.

But government was not the only context they faced. Relatively uninformed, they confronted markets that offered more precarious opportunities than they had expected. In response to these barriers they adjusted their business sector and made greater use than planned of the ethnic enclave economy. But not all entrepreneurs acted identically. Korean-Canadian entrepreneurs, for whom co-ethnic numbers were limited, sought mainstream markets dispersed across the metropolitan area.

Overall economic success was limited, generating subdued satisfaction and low revenues. Some of the same factors identified in the literature as prompting entrepreneurialism had additional effects in shaping success or failure. Human capital was clearly important, with education and some competence in English leading positively to better performances, or negatively to blocked mobility. On the other hand, the class resource of the scale of available financial capital was not a predictor of success. As European authors have suggested, use of ethnic resources was associated with lower business performance, and this effect was magnified when location was considered, with the ethnic enclave economy offering meagre opportunities. Consistent with the findings of economic sociology on national variations in ethnic entrepreneurialism, country of origin was also a significant indicator of business success. Koreans, far more likely to break out of the ethnic enclave economy, were much more successful than Hong Kong- and Taiwanese-origin migrants, who frequently did not. Breaking into the mainstream market was a decisive achievement (Jones *et al.* 2000; Engelen 2001).

Without relapsing to cultural essentialism, why were Korean businesses more likely to break out? While these entrepreneurs were the best educated, their English was poor and local ethnic resources were limited. One possible explanation was their more restricted economic transnationalism. For this group of 90 entrepreneurs it seems that transnational business linkages were not a strength but a distraction in terms of their Canadian entrepreneurialism. Many respondents maintained their primary income-generating activities off-shore, and stated that their move to Canada was motivated by quality of life and educational rather than economic opportunities. As Glover and Sim (2002) showed, a number of BIP entrepreneurs sold their Canadian business because options in Asia were more lucrative. Among the sample, Koreans were the only group who had established businesses that did not depend on buying or selling with their country of origin. They were most likely to remain self-employed, most likely to have their business as their principal income stream, and most likely to have the highest share of their income earned in Canada. Transnational business activities can delay a sense of identity as a Canadian national (Hiebert and Ley 2004). Despite initial disadvantages, Korean-origin entrepreneurs were more likely to have closed the door to transnational business and also to have pursued a model of economic integration with Canadian markets.

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