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Abstract

This study aims to examine Chinese, Filipino, and Asian Indian immigrants who were part of the U.S. labor force in 2009. The goal of this research is to identify the variables which most accurately influence the standard of living among these three groups once they are a part of U.S. labor market. I hypothesize that those immigrants who receive work in their ethnic niche occupations will have higher standards of living than those who do not work in the niche occupations. This study will focus narrowly on ethnic groups that come to the United States with relatively high levels of educational attainment. While many researchers have focused on immigration collectively, this research will add to existing literature by focusing narrowly on these three unique immigrant groups: Chinese, Filipino, and Asian Indians; and their associated standards of living in relation to occupation. I hypothesize that those immigrants who work in their ethnic niche occupations will have higher standards of living, *ceteris paribus*, than immigrants who do not.

The Effect of Niche Occupations on Standard of Living: A Closer Look at Chinese, Filipino, and Asian Indian Immigrants

Paige Maynard

I. Introduction

The trends in immigration to the United States are astonishing to consider. As of 2009 there were 1,130,818 persons whom received legal permanent residential status in the United States. This number compared to the 448,000 at the turn of the 20th century shows the drastic change that has occurred on the immigration front (DHS, 2010). Over the past century the United States has seen a shift not only in the number of immigrants arriving at the borders, but also a shift in the skill level of the immigrant. In 2009 the largest immigrant group was from Mexico followed by China, the Philippines, and India respectively (DHS, 2010). The three later groups make up an immigrant population that often comes to the United States with a skill set that can be used in a particular occupation. These are high achieving immigrants who often seek professional occupations in the United States labor market. Immigration statistics show that Chinese most commonly enter finance, business, or management positions (15.6% of Chinese immigrants in these positions), Filipinos enter healthcare support (14.8% of Filipino immigrants in these positions), and Asian Indians enter information technology positions (22.6% of Indian immigrants in these positions) in the U.S. labor market (MPI, 2010).

This study aims to examine Chinese, Filipino, and Asian Indian immigrants who were part of the U.S. labor force in 2009. The goal of this research is to identify the variables which most accurately influence the standard of living among these three groups once they are a part of U.S. labor market. I hypothesize that those immigrants who receive work in their ethnic niche occupations will have higher standards of living than those who do not work in the niche occupations. This study will focus narrowly on ethnic groups that come to the United States with relatively high levels of educational attainment. While many researchers have focused on immigration collectively, this research will add to existing literature by focusing narrowly on these three unique immigrant groups: Chinese, Filipino, and Asian Indians; and their associated standards of living in relation to occupation. I hypothesize that those immigrants who work in their ethnic niche occupations will have higher standards of living, ceteris paribus, than immigrants who do not.

II. Theory and Literature Review

The vast amount of literature on the topic of immigration and the U.S. labor market reveals just how important this issue is. For many years, scholars have identified the varying trends in immigration and immigrants' effects on the U.S. labor market. Over the years, not only has the number of immigrants increased, but immigrants are migrating to the U.S. for a number of reasons and are entering occupations that historically have not been occupied by immigrants. Through the 1970s, skilled immigrants comprised only about one fourth of the total immigrants, but this number has continued to grow ever since (Economic History Services, 2010). How immigrants are becoming high achieving, successful members of the U.S. labor market can be explained within the framework of network and human capital theories.

The role of immigrant networks needs to be considered when exploring immigrant niche occupations. Networks form a channel for the migration process. However, while migration often depends on these networks, it also serves to create new networks. Network theory has recently been studied within the discipline of economics, but has commonly been a part of sociological theory. Economic research focuses on the role of social ties and collective interactions in market settings, sharing of job information, and game theory situations while, sociological literature examines the effect networks have on occupational choice. A study by Granovetter (1973) generally examined the role of social ties and found that persons often receive jobs through both strong (people who they knew well) and weak (acquaintances that they knew less well) ties (Rosen, 2008). Networks are most commonly comprised of sets of people linked by acquaintance, kinship, and work experience. For the purpose of this study, networks of immigrant's own countrymen who have already immigrated, serve as a labor market contact for new persons coming to the United States. Before network theories were studied in great detail within the realm of economics, researchers, using data from 1960-1980, found that the low earnings of immigrants were attributed to the fact that their admission into the U.S. labor force was based on kinship and not occupational skill (Oructt, Duleep and Regets, 1996). On the contrary, today's research on immigrant networks has shown that not only is "immigrant clustering" in occupations a result of these networks, but there is also a large wage premium for immigrants who choose occupations in the labor markets which have the highest proportion of their own countrymen. Reasons for this premium may include increased collective bargaining power of the immigrant group when dealing with employers, internal references through networks leading to decreased job search costs for the company, or countrymen who are in positions of authority who may for

any number of reasons increase the wage of the immigrant employee (Waldinger, 1994, Patel and Vella, 2007). Thus, the power of the network theory is displayed. Immigrant connections are vital and often lead not only to job placement, but also to a higher wage. Moreover, immigrant networks serve the purpose of not only labor market contacts, but also for circulating goods and services, providing economic information, and perhaps most importantly for providing social and psychological support to immigrants who are new to a country (Vertovec, 2002).

A study by Zhao (2003) focused specifically on the role of immigrant networks in Chinese migration and used household data to find the key determinants of labor migration. In this study, special attention was paid to circular migration, which is when an immigrant returns to his or her home country a few times a year. Many believe that the return of the immigrant would prompt others to migrate. However, the results show that the more established migrants a village has, the more likely it is for others from their home country to migrate out of their home country as well. In circular migration, the return of an immigrant to their home country actually diminished the likelihood of out-migration by others. The returnee could however serve the purpose of bringing back information on the size of the earning gap and potential migratory destinations. Current migrants (or migrant networks) are more likely to influence out-migration than those who return home. The current migrants are able to provide specific job and economic information and are a stable contact in the migratory destination (Zhao, 2003). Through this study we see how important migrant networks can be in influencing others to migrate.

Human capital theory is another logical theoretical framework to consider when studying immigration. Human capital theory refers to the ability of individuals to become income earning agents in an economy (Rosen, 2008). In the case of this study, Gary Becker's idea of firm-specific capital is interesting to consider. Firm specific capital refers to a person's contribution to a specific organization or in this case industry (Rosen, 2008). Immigrants who receive jobs in a particular field have invested in education or training to perfect skills within that field. This idea is further explained by Carmel Chiswick in her work, "The Economic Determinants of Ethnic Assimilation" (2009). Here, Chiswick argues that "ethnic differences in consumption and labor supply induce differences in patterns of investment in general human capital, resulting in cases of occupational 'specialization'" (Chiswick, 2009). She uses this idea of preferences in consumption to explain the gap between high achieving and disadvantaged ethnic groups. Furthermore, she explains that the likelihood of an immigrant to fully assimilate into a new country depends on the ability of that person's ethnic human capital (human capital attained because of an affiliation with an ethnic group) and general human capital (human capital that is generally shared by all) to act as complements.

The role of ethnic human capital is necessary to consider in a study such as this. The transfer of ethnic human capital from one generation to the next could consist of the transfer of beliefs or values in addition to monetary investments. Along with the many benefits of ethnic human capital, the extent to which an immigrant holds on to these forms of ethnic human capital may affect their ability to assimilate and become successful in the U.S. economy. One example of this is the one child policy in effect in China. If two immigrant couples migrate to the United States and have the same household income, but one couple holds on to this practice, while the other has three or four children, the standard of living of the one child couple would be higher than the standard of living of the other. Family structure is often an important aspect of ethnic human capital and thus, will be controlled for in the study. Linking the effects of ethnic human capital to niche occupations comes when the holder of niche occupation is able to pass on skills or contacts to others within the ethnic group. The recipient of the "help" will then have higher levels of human capital upon entering the niche occupation.

Network theory coupled with human capital theory sets the stage for the remainder of this research study. When looking at specific immigrant groups within niche occupations, both of these theories come into play. Immigrants may gain entry into a specific niche occupation because of established networks, acquired human or ethnic capital, or both. These theories present why immigrants so commonly enter niche occupations and demonstrate how holding a job within a niche occupation may indeed increase the immigrant's standard of living.

III. Data

The data for this study comes from the Minnesota population center's IPUMS current population survey (CPS) (Miriam et al, 2010). The CPS is administered once a month to approximately 50,000 households by the Bureau of the Census and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The survey seeks to primarily collect information on employment statues; however, its broad range of questions makes this a suitable database for many types of individual or household level research. The many benefits of this database include the amount of demographic, economic, and educational questions available, as well as the large sample size.

For the purpose of this study, the CPS is the database of choice because of the sufficient representation of the U.S. immigrant population. Furthermore, nearly 1,000 occupational codes are included along with industry breakdowns of the occupations. This variable makes the CPS data ideal for looking at niche occupations as each of the observed niche occupations is located within the dataset. For the purpose of this study only 2009 data will be observed. Similar to a study by Partridge, Rickman, and Ali (2009), the data used for this research are not regionally specific, but include immigrants from the entire countries of China, India, and the Philippines. This allows for large trends to emerge and does not over represent one geographical location.

IV. Empirical Model

In this study, three OLS regressions will be used to analyze the effect of holding a job within a niche occupation on an immigrant's standard of living. The dependent variable is standard of living. Using the framework found in the work of Sandford and Seeborg (2003), this variable is calculated by dividing total household income by the poverty level of income. A statistic that is less than one implies that the family is living below the poverty line. Family income, instead of individual income, is used because in determining standard of living it is important to take into account family factors outside of wage

and salary such as family decisions regarding marriage and number of children. The primary independent variable is a dummy variable which will show if the immigrant holds a job within the niche occupation.

Only data of those individuals who were part of the U.S. labor force in 2009 will be included in the models. Using the hundreds of job codes from the data, each occupation was examined and put into a niche category if it fell under finance, business or management for Chinese, healthcare support of Filipinos, and information technology for Asian Indians. Furthermore, the model controls for gender, marital status, number of years in the United States, number of children under the age of 18 living in the household, and educational attainment. Age was pre-controlled for by selecting cases of individuals who were between the ages of 24 and 65. This range was chosen because it accounts for a suitable working age population. Table 1 provides a more complete explanation of all independent and dependent variables and expected signs.

Using Model 1, three (Chinese, Asian Indian, Filipino) regressions will be run which allow for comparison within the immigrant groups. Regression 1 will compare the standard of living of Chinese immigrants who hold a job in management, business, or finance occupations to those Chinese immigrants who hold jobs outside of said occupations. Regression 2 will compare the standard of living of Filipino immigrants who hold jobs in healthcare support occupations to those Filipino immigrants who hold jobs outside of said occupations. Regression 3 will compare the standard of living of Asian Indian immigrants who hold jobs in information technology occupations to those Asian Indian immigrants who hold jobs outside of said occupations. Model 2 introduces natives and allows for comparisons between each immigrant group and the natives who hold jobs within each of the three immigrant niche occupations. Natives are defined as anyone who is born in the United States. Each immigrant group will be compared separately to the natives who hold jobs in their immigrant niche occupation.

Model 1: Standard of Living (SOL) = β0 + β1 (NICHEDUMMY) + β2 (GENDERDUMMY) + β3(SINLGEDUM1)+ β4 (DIVORCEDUM2)+ β5 (WIDOWDUM3)+ β6 (YRSINUS)+ β7 (NCHILD) + β8 (HSDUM1) + β9 (COLLEGEDUM2)+ β10 (GRADDUM3)+ μ

Model 2: Standard of Living (SOL) = β0 + β1(NICHEDUMMY)+ β2 (GENDERDUMMY) + β3(SINLGEDUM1)+ β4 (DIVORCEDUM2)+ β5(WIDOWDUM3)+ β6(NCHILD) + β7 (HSDUM1) + β8 (COLLEGEDUM2)+ β9 (GRADDUM3)+ μ

V. Results

The results proceed in two sections. First, results are presented that compare the immigrant group working in the niche occupation to the immigrant group outside of the niche occupation. Following that, natives are introduced, which allows for comparisons to be made between immigrants and natives who are both working in the niche occupation. Both are useful and necessary comparisons when looking at immigrants' standards of living and the role niche occupations play in that statistic.

Immigrants in Niche vs. Immigrants Outside Niche

To begin, descriptive statistics were run on the immigrant data to show the extent to which the respondents held jobs in their niche occupations. These percentages provide context to the regressions which use niche occupation as a dummy variable. The results of the frequencies can be seen in Table 2.

By running three separate OLS regressions for each group, Chinese, Filipinos, and Asian Indians, the results yield the effect of working in the niche occupation on standard of living. The important results will be highlighted in the text; however the regression results in their entirety can be seen in Table 3.

Chinese

The overall Chinese regression has an adjusted r square of .186 and all of the coefficients have the predicted signs. Most importantly, the regression results show that Chinese who hold occupations in finance, business or management have a standard of living that is 1.26 poverty units higher than those Chinese immigrants who do not hold jobs in these sectors. This statistic is significant at the .05 level. Chinese are a large and established immigrant group in the United States and thus, it is reasonable that Chinese networks would also be more established than other immigrant networks. Because of these networks, it is not surprising that the standard of living is larger for those in the Chinese niche occupations. The data contains many occupational codes under the headings of "management operations, business operations, and financial specialties" and therefore, Chinese niche occupations are well represented in the data. Also, occupations in finance, business, and management are generally high paying positions, which could explain why holding these occupations could lead to higher standards of living. The results also show that holding a graduate degree, holding a college degree, and number of years in the United States all are significant at the .001 level and positively affect a Chinese immigrant's standard of living. On the contrary, the number of children negatively impacts standard of living, and this is significant at the .001 level. Surprisingly, "widowed" is the only marital status variable that is significant. While, "divorced" and "single" show the predicted signs, neither are significant. Furthermore, gender is also not significant.

Filipino

The overall Filipino regression has an adjusted r square of .125 and all of the coefficients have the predicted sign. Unlike the Chinese regression, the "NICHEDUMMY" variable is insignificant, which accounted for Filipino's who hold occupations in the healthcare support sector. This could be because Filipinos are entering other higher paying occupations or simply because countrymen networks are not as established in the healthcare support industry. As before, the results show that a graduate degree, college degree, and number of years in the U.S. are significant at the .001 level and positively affect a Filipino's standard of living. However, the positive effect is not as large of a positive impact as it is with the Chinese immigrants. Once again, number of children and being single negatively impacts the standard of living.

Asian Indian

The overall Asian Indian regression has an adjusted r square of .165 and the coefficients have the predicted signs. Similar

to the Filipino regression, the "NICHEDUMMY" variable is insignificant. Therefore, Asian Indians who hold occupations in the information technology sector do not have significantly higher standards of living than their counterparts. Like the Filipino immigrants, this could be because Asian Indians are entering other higher paying occupations. Furthermore, the occupational codes from the CPS data do not contain specific "information technology" occupations. Instead various computer and mathematical occupations served as the best proxy. As before, holding a graduate degree, college degree, and number of years in the U.S. positively affects standard of living, while number of children negatively affects standard of living. Each of these variables are significant at the .001 level. Unlike the other immigrant groups, the "divorce" variable is the only significant variable in the set of marital status dummies.

Immigrants in Niche vs. Natives in Niche

After the results of Model 1 were analyzed, Model 2 was introduced which added natives, or those born in the United States, for means of comparison. To begin with descriptive statistics were run. Table 4 displays the percentage of natives in each of the niche occupations.

Table 4 displays the complete results of the regressions run with native data. The results of Model 1 and 2 together show how immigrants' standards of living compare to those of natives within their same occupation. However, it should be noted that the results between Model 1 and 2 are not completely comparable because the equations are not structurally identical. While years in the U.S. are controlled for in Model 1, there is no similar control in the natives in Model 2.

All of the variables included in the three native regressions are significant at the .001 level, perhaps because of the large sample size. This includes the dummy variables which account for natives in the immigrant niche occupations. The regression which accounted for natives in the Chinese niche occupation has an adjusted r square of .152. The variable OCCChina shows that natives in finance, business, or management occupations have a standard of living that is 1.53 poverty units higher than those natives who hold occupations elsewhere. Indeed, these occupations lead to higher standards of living. The native statistic of 1.53 is comparable to the 1.26 that was found in the Chinese immigrant regression. The regression which accounted for natives in Filipino niche occupations has an adjusted r square of .144. The variable OCCFlip has a coefficient of .133. This means that natives who hold occupations in healthcare support have a standard of living that is .133 poverty units higher than those in other occupations. Although this coefficient is not as large as the Chinese occupation is it still significant unlike the niche statistic for the Filipino immigrant cohort. The regression which accounted for natives in Asian Indian niche occupations has an adjusted r square of .144 as well. The variable OCCIndia shows that natives who hold occupations in information technology have a standard of living that is .922 poverty units higher than their counterparts. This coefficient is significant unlike the niche occupation variable which accounted for Asian Indian immigrants.

The hypothesis was correct in the fact that holding a job in an immigrant niche occupation positively affects standard of living. In each of the six regressions run, the niche occupation had a positive coefficient. However, since both the Filipino and Asian Indian statistics were not significant, this finding cannot formally be accepted for these two immigrant cohorts. The Chinese immigrant group contained the only significant immigrant niche statistic, and therefore they are the only group for which the hypothesis can be accepted. Ceteris paribus, Chinese in finance, business, or management positions do indeed have higher standards of living than their counterparts. The Chinese immigrant group is the only group which can statistically be compared to the native population as well. The niche dummy variable was 1.26 poverty units for the Chinese immigrants and 1.54 poverty units for the native population. This shows that business, management, and finance occupations lead to higher standards of living, no matter who holds the occupation (immigrant or native). This finding suggests that Chinese immigrants chose a niche occupation which is generally highly rewarded. Moreover, natives who hold these positions have slightly higher standards of living than immigrants who hold the same positions. This could be because natives on average earn more than immigrants or because of cultural norms or capital immigrants hold that may affect their standard of living.

VI. Conclusions

The amount of recent economics literature and empirical studies on the U.S. immigrant population demonstrates the increasingly large role immigrants are playing in the economy and more importantly, the U.S. labor market. With immigration issues on the political and economic forefront, it is important for the United States to understand the type of immigrants that are a part of our workforce. Recent years have seen an increase in the highly educated and skilled immigrant coming to the U.S. These immigrants are seeking professional positions in the labor market. Without a doubt there are niche occupations these immigrant groups are a part of, whether because of formal training or labor market contacts in the occupation.

It is interesting to consider the effect of a niche occupation on a wage statistic in the form of standard of living. Based on the results from this study, Chinese immigrants are the only immigrant group of the three (Chinese, Filipino, and Asian Indian) in which holding a niche occupation is statistically significant and positively affects standard of living. This is important as Chinese are the second largest immigrant population in the United States. These findings are valuable not only for Chinese citizens looking to migrate, but also for the Chinese immigrants currently in the U.S. This increase in the standard of living speaks not only to the skill set of Chinese immigrants, but also to the networks which so commonly serve as labor market contacts.

The findings from this study complement the literature on the topic of immigrant labor market participation nicely. As the literature suggests, immigrants who enter niche occupations are likely to see an increase in their wages relative to immigrants who enter non-niche occupations (Waldinger, 1994, Patel and Vella, 2007). This is true for the Chinese immigrant population. Per the network theory, it is known that large networks of one's own countrymen are beneficial to the immigrant. Since the Chinese are the second largest immigrant group in the United States, only behind Mexico, it is not surprising that there would be large and established groups of Chinese immigrants in the

Unites States. Literature on the topic also states that both ethnic and general human capitals are determinants of an immigrant's success (Chiswick, 2009). This study found that human capital in the form of education does indeed increase the standard of living for all three immigrant groups. Although no proxy for ethnic human capital was used in this study, it would be interesting to consider such a variable in the future.

Further research on this topic should be conducted to understand the complete effect of niche occupations on immigrants in the United States. Perhaps, looking beyond the specific immigrant group and natives into other immigrant groups who hold Chinese niche occupations, for instance, would demonstrate the extent to which the niche occupation is beneficial to the immigrant. Also, by looking more narrowly at wage or income statistics, instead of standard of living, one could find more concrete financial measures of niche occupations. Furthermore, the human capital theory would play more of a role, which is a necessary component of any immigrant study.

The findings of this study add to existing literature and theory by focusing specifically on three immigrant groups and their respective niche occupations. As globalization continues to take hold of our world, research on the immigrant population is sure to continue to change. The extent to which immigrants enter professional occupations in the United States labor market is a topic that should be closely observed. Through research such as this, we can better identify the occupations which hold the highest benefit for the immigrant population.

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Table 1: Variables and Descriptions

Variable Name	Description	Expected Sign
Dependent		
Standard of Living (SOL)	Total Household Income/ Cutoff Poverty Measure	
Independent		
Niche Occupation (NICHEDUMMY)	0=non-niche, 1=niche	positive
Native Niche Occupation		
(OCCChina)	0=native not in Chinese niche 1=native in Chinese niche	positive
(OCCFilp)	0=native not in Filipino niche 1=native in Filipino niche	
(OCCIndia)	0=native not in Indian niche 1=native in Indian niche	
Gender (GENDERDUMMY)	0=male 1=female	unknown
Marital Status		
(SINGLEDUM1)	0= not single, 1=single	unknown
(DIVORCEDUM2)	0=not divorced, 1=divorced	
(WIDOWDUM3)	0=not widowed, 1=widowed	
Years in U.S. (YRSINUS)	# of years in U.S. (2009 – yr. of immigration)	unknown
Number of Children (NCHILD)	# of children living in household under age 18	negative
Educational Attainment		positive
(HSDUM1)	0= no HS diploma, 1=HS diploma	
(COLLEGEDUM2)	0=no college degree, 1=college degree	
(GRADDUM3)	0=no graduate degree, 1=graduate degree	

Table 2: Frequencies of Immigrants Niche Occupation

Occupation (Actual Number)	**Chinese Niche**	**Filipino Niche**	**Indian Niche**
Niche	17.05% (88)	19.5% (166)	25.7% (204)
Not in Niche	82.95% (428)	80.5% (685)	74.3% (587)
N	516	851	791

Table 3: Regression Results: Model 1 and Model 2

	CHINESE		PHILLIPPINES		INDIA	
	Model 1 (Immigrants)	Model 2 (Natives)	Model 1 (Immigrants)	Model 2 (Natives)	Model 1 (Immigrants)	Model 2 (Natives)
Constant	2.82	4.32	3.52	4.37	3.54	4.36
	(3.88)	(150.37)	(7.02)	(151.23)	(5.11)	(151.23)
NICHEDUMMY	1.26**		.080		.16	
	(2.25)		(.190)		(.368)	
OCCCHINA		1.54***				
		(42.26)				
OCCFILP				.133***		
				(2.35)		
OCCINDIA						.922***
						(10.14)
GENDERDUMMY	.62	-.08***	.42	-.12***	.33	-.10***
	(1.47)	(-4.35)	(1.26)	(-6.30)	(.903)	(-5.54)
SINGLEDUM1	-.53	-.79***	.89	-.84***	-.75	-.85***
	(-.77)	(-29.8)	(1.66)	(-31.58)	(-1.25)	(-31.62)
DIVORCEDUM2	-1.32	-1.25***	.05*	-1.28***	-3.09**	-1.28***
	(-1.21)	(-36.17)	(.081)	(-36.94)	(-2.94)	(-36.83)
WIDOWDUM3	-3.78*	-1.46***	.820	-1.48***	-.082	-1.48***
	(-1.77)	(-28.91)	(.790)	(-29.25)	(-.047)	(-29.31)
YRSINUS	.095***		.08***		.11***	
	(5.07)		(5.51)		(5.92)	
NCHILD	-.754***	-.75***	-.73***	-.75***	-.97***	-.75***
	(-3.19)	(-69.69)	(-5.20)	(-69.09)	(-5.20)	(-69.10)
HSDUM1	-.134*	-.47***	-.50	-.51***	-1.01	-.50***
	(-.20)	(-18.78)	(-1.08)	(-20.27)	(-1.20)	(-20.13)
COLLEGEDUM2	2.72***	1.85***	2.02***	2.02***	2.82***	1.99***
	(4.10)	(58.88)	(5.40)	(64.52)	(4.40)	(63.70)
GRADDUM3	4.13***	3.43***	2.97***	3.57***	4.24***	3.56***
	(6.76)	(85.52)	(4.56)	(88.92)	(6.79)	(88.79)
N	515	180012	850	180012	850	180012
Adjusted R-square	.186	.152	.125	.144	.175	.144

*Significance at the .10 level
**Significance at the .05 level
***Significance at the .001 level

Table 4: Frequencies of Natives in Niche Occupation

Occupation (Actual Number)	Chinese Niche	Filipino Niche	Indian Niche
Niche	7.51%	2.73%	1.01%
	(13531)	(4914)	(1825)
Not in Niche	92.49%	97.27%	98.99%
	(166533)	(175150)	(178239)
N	180064	180064	180064