From Chinatown to Every Town: New Patterns of Employment and Settlement for Recent

Chinese Immigrants in the United States*

Zai Liang and Jiejin Li

Department of Sociology State University of New York 1400 Washington Ave. Albany, NY 12222 Phone; 518-442-4676 Fax: 518-442-4936 E-mail: <u>zliang@albany.edu</u>

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Abstract

Building on the growing literature on new immigrant destinations, this paper examines new settlement patterns of low skilled Chinese immigrants in the United States. We identify an important channel of settlement in new destinations for the case of Chinese low skilled immigrants: employment agencies in New York City's Chinatown. We carried out a survey of employment agencies. Our findings suggest that there has been a profound change in settlement patterns of low skilled immigrants: moving away from traditional Chinatowns in major American cities toward non-gateway destinations and rural areas. These new settlement locations are characterized by low unemployment rate, low crime rate but with a variety of racial compositions. We discuss the implications of this fundamental change for immigrant socioeconomic mobility in the American society.

Introduction

On Jan 28, 2005, *the Wall Street Journal* ran a front-page article entitled "On the East Coast, Chinese Buses Give Greyhound a Run (Newman, 2005)." It was a story about bus companies operated by Chinese immigrants that were competing with Greyhound buses for customers on the east coast routes. The story took many by surprise because for some it is unconceivable that immigrants owned businesses could compete directly with huge corporations like Greyhound (worth \$1 billion at that time). However, beneath this sensational report lies a sociological story of recent Chinese immigration and settlement to non-gateway destinations in the United States. The Chinese bus companies, located in Manhattan's Chinatown, came into being precisely because they aim to serve the need of recent Chinese immigrants who find jobs in Chinese restaurants located in far away destinations, typically the non-gateway settings such as Rhode Island, Maine, or even Ohio. As these companies gain a solid footing in the business, they began to pick up other passengers along the way. As it turns out, the immigrant owned bus companies have flexible schedules, convenient pick-up/drop off points, and less expensive bus fares, thus we have the report on *the Wall Street Journal*.

Immigration researchers have long taken it for granted that immigrants tend to concentrate in major gateway cities and states. In fact, because of this tendency, for many Chinese immigrants, going to the United States is almost equivalent of going to the Gold Mountain (San Francisco). Traditional settlement cities in many ways symbolize what America is all about. Some of the well-cited studies also reflect this empirical reality, focusing mainly on major metropolitan areas that received large numbers of immigrants (Foner, 2000; Logan et al., 2002; Logan et al., 1994; Nee and Nee, 1973; Portes and Bach, 1985; Waters, 1999; Zhou, 1992). Some even observed that the post-1965 immigrants concentrate even more in selected locations than previous immigrant cohorts (Massey, 1995; Min, 2006). In recent years, however,

immigration researchers have noticed that many immigrants began arriving at non-traditional destinations. Using data from the U.S. Census, Singer (2004) shows that nearly one-third of US immigrants resided outside of established settlement states in 2000. Several groups of scholars have studied this emerging phenomenon and major findings have been reported in several recent volumes (Gozdziak and Martin, 2005; Massey, 2008; Zuniga and Hernandes-Leon, 2005). These studies have given us significant insights into the process of settlement in new destinations. Most of the earlier studies focus on Mexican immigrants. We argue that to enhance our understanding of this new settlement process, it is equally important to carefully examine other groups which may reveal different patterns. In this project, we propose to study recently arrived low skilled Chinese immigrants in new destinations.

Previous researchers have underscored two major justifications for studying settlement of immigrants in new destinations. One is an uncertain future for assimilation because new destinations often do not have the appropriate institutions that are usually associated with traditional destinations such as ethnic-based churches, bilingual education for children and bilingual services (i.e. hospital, department of motor vehicle, and emergency medical service), sizable ethnic communities (i.e. Chinatown or Korean town), and immigrant based organization (hometown associations). It is argued that these institutions in the traditional immigrant destinations can ease the initial settlement process and ultimately help immigrants assimilate into the American society. Researchers also noted that residents in non-gateway destination usually do not have prior experience of encounter with immigrants, an issue that raises questions for potential troubled race and ethnic relations (Massey, 2008; Waters and Jimenez, 2005).

While acknowledging these arguments are likely to hold for Chinese immigrants, we argue that the study of Chinese immigrants in new destinations brings additional theoretical and empirical significance. A major trend that characterizes recent settlement of Chinese immigrants in non-gateway destinations is that the process involves both Chinese employers

(restaurant owners) and employees. To the extent that business ownership in itself can be a measure of success, expansion of Chinese restaurants to non-gateway destinations provides a new (perhaps faster) avenue for economic mobility. In addition, expansion of Chinese immigrants owned businesses into non-traditional destinations also poses challenging questions for scholars of ethnic economies who tend to have a consensus that ethnic economies need to be concentrated (Logan et al., 1994). How do Chinese immigrant owners operate and adapt in such a new environment is not well understood. Furthermore, the recruitment mechanism for moving to new destinations may well be very different for Chinese immigrants than for other groups. Indeed, for the Chinese case, there is a heavy reliance on employment service agencies (ESAs) (located in Chinatown in NYC) operated by Chinese immigrants. The ESAs serve as a linkage between employers and potential employees and provide critical information about the new destination and employers. In some ways, ESAs facilitate (perhaps more than what they realize) the settlement process for employees who venture into the new destinations. Thus a systematic examination of new patterns of employment and settlement among recently arrived low skilled Chinese immigrants is clearly needed.

Using NYC as a major research site, the proposed project joins growing research efforts to examine patterns of settlement and assimilation among recent Chinese immigrants in nongateway settings. Specifically, we have three objectives. First, we will examine the driving forces for expansion of Chinese restaurants into non-gateway destinations. We consider both characteristics in new destinations and characteristics in New York (including cost of doing a business in New York and supply of immigrant labor). Second, from immigrant workers' perspective, we examine the actual recruitment and mechanism of this new settlement process. The critical question is whether immigrants continue relying on traditional migration networks or use alternative mechanism for jobs located in non-gateway destinations? Third, we aim to explore the large question of consequences of this new settlement pattern for immigrant

adaptation. Specific measures of interest include role of immigrant legal status, wage growth patterns, entrepreneurship, religious practice, and political participation.

Background and Hypotheses

Review of Previous Studies

Historically, immigrants to the United States tended to settle in several urban destinations. This concentration in part reflects the role of migration networks, which channeled new immigrants to places where earlier cohorts settled. Immigrant settlement is urban because of employment opportunities and more receptive nature of urban environment for immigrants. However, the decade of the 1990s signified a major shift in patterns of immigrant settlement: large number of immigrants moved to new destination cities such as Atlanta, Las Vegas, Denver, and significant volume of immigrants moved to non-metropolitan areas as well (Donato et al., 2008; Singer, 2004).¹ Using data from censuses and American Community Survey for recently arrived immigrants (in the 5 years prior to the census date), Massey and Capoferro (2008) provide perhaps the most systematic portrait of the geographic diversification of American immigration. For example, in 1990, 35% of recent immigrants resided in California and the percentage declined to 23% by 2000. Likewise, 13.4% of immigrants resided in New York in 1990 and it drooped to 5.9% by 2000. Among all immigrant groups, perhaps the most dramatic drop in the settlement of California is for Mexicans whose percentage living in California dropped from 63% in 1990 to 33% in 2005 (Massey and Capoferro, 2008).

This dramatic shift in the settlement patterns has stimulated increasing research in this area. Massey and Capoferro (2008) suggested four explanations for this diversification of settlement patterns. The first factor focuses on the effect of Legalization Program from IRCA of 1986 that resulted in the saturation of labor market, especially in California. The pass of

¹ Singer (2004) calls some of the new destination cities as "new immigrant gateways (p.5)."

Proportion 187 further makes California a less welcome environment for immigrants. The third factor is "selective hardening of the border" that deflect immigrants to other destinations. However, immigrants also have a choice to move to other states (the gateway destinations as they had been doing for a long time), once they cross the border. But they seem to settle in new destinations at least for a while. The last factor is the changing geography of labor demand, as a result of restructuring of production. The restructuring of production often means deuninization of the workforce, subcontracting of labor, and relocation of plants to non-metropolitan areas to avoid unions. As a result of this restructuring, jobs become less attractive to native workers and immigrants become more reliable and flexible workforce. Several recent studies have provided evidence that is consistent with this perception (Parrado and Kandel, 2008; Leach and Bean, 2008). In the case of California, Light's (2006) recent work points to the role of local government in creating an unwelcome context that encourages relocation of immigrants in non-gateway destinations.

In sum, previous studies have clearly documented patterns of geographic diversification of recent immigrants and have advanced several explanations and presented initial evidence for this diversification. Researchers have also expressed concerns for the prospects of immigrant assimilation in new destinations (Fennelly, 2008; Waters and Jemenz, 2005). We note that much of this work centered on the experience of Mexican and Latin American immigrants. In fiscal year 2007, 41% of immigrants came from Latin American countries and 34% came from Asian countries (US Homeland Security, 2008). Thus it is important to see if there is a story, perhaps a different story, of geographic diversification for Asian immigrants. Building on this body of recent literature, the proposed project will examine the geographic diversification of recent Chinese immigrants. We contribute to the current literature in three ways. One is that we study relocation of both employers (Chinese restaurant owners) and employees. Second, we examine

the role of employment service agencies in the process of relocation to new destination. Third, we will explore the consequences of settlement for immigrants in new destinations.

From Chinatown to Non-gateway Destinations

For a long time, to study Chinese immigrants, researchers needed only go to Chinatowns in different cities. However, this is no longer the case for study of contemporary Chinese immigrants in the U.S. In fact, for much of recent low skilled Chinese immigrants, most of the employment opportunities are located outside of Chinatown. This project will provide a muchnuanced analysis of the process of settlement in non-gateway destinations. We argue that this process was initially driven by the saturation of Chinese restaurant market, which has been a job machine for generations of Chinese immigrants in NYC. This time period also saw a major rise in immigration from China's Fujian province, which has created major demand for jobs (Liang, 2001). By the time many recent Chinese immigrants arrived in New York in the 1990s, there were no longer lots of places to open new Chinese restaurants in NYC. In addition, the commercial rent in NYC shot up in the 1990s, which did not help. Some immigrant entrepreneurs (who arrived earlier and already accumulated substantial financial capital) saw opportunity elsewhere, i.e. non-gateway destinations. Entrepreneurs have capital and labor supply, but they still face other challenges. One is how to make sure there are enough customers for Chinese restaurants in non-gateway destinations? Most residents in non-gateway destinations are not sophisticated restaurants goers and often taken back by the complex and foreign looking Chinese menus. This explains the innovation and popularity of all you can east Chinese buffet restaurants. What you see is what you get. This also works perfect with new Chinese immigrant workers because workers in buffet restaurants need only very basic spoken English to get by. The second challenge is how to get immigrant workers to the non-gateway destinations, since most of them do not speak English well, Greyhound bus is not an option.

Immigrant entrepreneurs ended up with starting their own bus companies (thus explains the *Wall Street Journal* story).

To understand the settlement of Chinese immigrants in new locations, we first need to examine the expansion of Chinese restaurant business to new locations. The expansion of Chinese restaurants has been going on at a spectacular speed. According to some sources, there are over 48,000 Chinese restaurants (including buffet and take-outs) in the U.S., a number that is more than that of the combination of McDonald's, Burger King, and Wendy's outlets combined (Lee, 2008; Luo, 2006). They have spread all across the United States, rural or urban, towns big or small. The ubiquity of Chinese restaurant did not happen accidentally, but rather as a result of multiple forces in operation.

Our first research question is to examine location choice of Chinese restaurants. Following previous studies (Card and Lewis, 2007; Leach and Bean, 2008; Parrado and Kandel, 2008), we pay attention to economic indicators of the destinations: poverty rate, male unemployment rate, and mean/median household income. Following Card and Lewis (2007), we will also use business climate of the location, using county business data. We expect Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs will be more likely to open new restaurants in locations undergoing economic growth and rising employment and business opportunities. In light of sever fatal incidents of Chinese food delivery boys, we expect Chinese entrepreneurs are also sensitive to crime rate in non-gateway destinations. To explain internal migration of immigrants, researchers often use measure of number of immigrants who went in earlier years (Kritz and Nogel , 1994; Leach and Bean, 2008). In our case, we do not expect number of previous Chinese immigrants in the location to be a significant predictor, because any location with significant Chinese immigrant population is likely to have other Chinese restaurants around already who may create

potential for business competition.² An important player that is rarely discussed in the current literature on non-gateway destinations is the recruitment process for immigrants.³ In the Chinese immigrant case, this is employment service agency (ESA). In the three or four blocks around East Broadway and Eldrige in Manhattan's Chinatown, there are nearly 40 ESAs. These ESAs are important players in facilitating this process of settlement in new destinations. Like any recruitment agencies, ESAs in Chinatown reduce transactions costs for employers (Williamson, 1975). More importantly, staff members in ESAs provide much needed information about non-gateway destinations and even work with bus companies to provide bus service for immigrants to travel to these new restaurants. Since they have the most up to date information on the restaurant job market, they can also relay information to bus companies and suggest new bus routes to new locations.

Another important feature of ESAs, perhaps most interesting sociologically, is that it introduces market mechanisms in the settlement for immigrants. The traditional way of employment/settlement is more kinship/relatives-based, i.e. immigrants work for relatives or relatives' friends and thus they may be exploited and cannot complain or relocate (Sanders and Nee, 1987).⁴ The introduction of ESAs has fundamentally changed the employment opportunity structure for immigrants. They now have more choices in terms of job locations, types of jobs, and salary scales (all job related information is posted on the bulletin board of ESAs). Jobs in non-gateway destinations may also look attractive because most employers there provide room and board whereas jobs in NYC restaurants provide only free food. With market mechanisms, immigrant salary is likely to be more reflecting market prices. A recent report suggests this is indeed the case in that chefs in Chinese restaurants in non-gateway locations are paid about

² In fact, in our early project (which also involved interviews with entrepreneurship), the biggest nightmare restaurants owners fear is another Chinese restaurant opening down the block.

³ Massey (2008) mentioned in passing on p. 345 for the case of Mexican immigrants but did not elaborate.

⁴ We note other researchers hold a different view for the enclave economy (Wilson and Portes, 1980; Zhou, 1992).

\$2,300-\$2,700 as compared to chefs in NYC who are paid about \$2,000-\$2,300/month (Zeng, 2009). Employers who offer below market wages are not likely to receive many job applicants who know salary level of other job listings. Furthermore, job mobility is increasingly possible and facilitated because immigrants can leave the current jobs for other higher paying jobs without constraints imposed by jobs through kinship/relatives. The opportunity for business formation may be enhanced as well. Most employers will stay close to their employees and provide shuttle service for going to work and some business tips may be exchanged on the way to work. Thus the training system for entrepreneurship may work more effective in new destinations than in New York City where employer's main concern is that workers get job done (Bailey and Waldinger, 1991). Besides ESAs, pursuits of jobs in non-gateway destinations also depend on migrant characteristics. Just like the migration from home country to the U.S. initially (Cerruti and Massey, 2001; Pessar, 1999), we expect that men are more likely to venture into new destinations. We also hypothesize that legal status is linked to the probability of working in non-gateway destinations. This is especially important in the aftermath of September 11 when immigration authorities routinely check legal documents for long distance bus customers and conduct raids in work places (Cao, 2009).⁵

Research Design and Methods

The research design took advantage of our prior experiences of NYC survey of immigrants from China's Fujian province, use some existing data (at the county level), and conduct a new data collection of employers and employees at selected new destinations.

Data Sources

(1) Job listings from ESAs

⁵ The Obama administration is likely to change this practice (Simpson, 2009).

On September 2010, we carried out a survey of employment agencies in Chinatown. For each employment agency, we copied job related information: location of the job (by phone area code), salary level, type of job (chef or food delivery) or any other information about the job (how tips are distributed, any preference for immigrants who came from different parts of China).

(2) Phone Area Code data and County Level Data.

When analyzing business location choices, we use area code level as our unit because job listings are classified by area code. The idea is to examine how area code level characteristics are related to number of Chinese restaurants in a particular area code covered geographic area. We use county level data to generate area code level data for analysis (procedure discussed below). Three kinds of county level data will be used: county level poverty and income data, county level current business patterns (CBP) data, and county level crime data. The first two data sets were downloaded from US Census Bureau and County level crime data are downable from US Department of Justice.⁶

NYC as a Major Research Site

As we can see, our starting point in this project is in NYC's Chinatown. Naturally one may wonder about by focusing on NYC we may present a somewhat incomplete picture of settlement in non-gateway destinations. For example, there is a reason to expect major differences between east coast and west coast (see some of the chapters in David Halle's (2003) volume on comparison of NYC and LA). Our decision to use NYC as a starting point is motivated by several factors. First, previous studies show that NYC is often the initial settlement place for most Fujianese immigrants and major Fujianese immigrant hometown

⁶ See website (<u>http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2007/data/table_10.html</u>).

associations are all based in NYC (Chin, 1999; Keefe, 2009; Guest; 2004; Liang, 2001; Zhang, 2008). Thus by studying NYC's ESAs and subsequent immigrant settlement to non-gateway destinations, we are likely to capture a large portion Fujianese immigrants. Second, our initial data analysis shows that these ESAs have jobs that are located in many parts of the country that covers many non-gateway destinations (see Figure 1). This assures us that ESAs based in NYC are not simply providing job information along the east coast, but pretty much covering substantial part of the country. Third, our decision is also dictated by the budget cap set by the Foundation. Having said, we think that ideally we probably want to study ESAs in both east coast and west coast. For example, after a preliminary study of selected ESAs in Southern California, one thing we have noticed is that ESAs in CA tend to cover diverse kinds of jobs: restaurants, nanny, massage worker, and construction workers etc. In contrast, ESAs in NYC tend to focus entirely on restaurant jobs. In addition, there are also ESAs in CA that cater to high level professionals.

Analytic Strategy

(1) Mapping of Business Locations and Construction of Area Code level Data

Survey of 10 ESAs will generate a list of employers/restaurants identified by phone area codes. Using counts of Chinese restaurants located in specific area code, we will map the contour of business locations by area code zone using area code boundary file. In addition, we also map patterns of restaurant distribution by other characteristics (i.e. median household income, poverty level, and crime rate) of the area code zone. To do this, we need to use county level data information and "convert" it to information at the area code level. Both telephone area code boundary and county level boundary files are available from ESRI Data and Maps.⁷ With these two sets of files, we can generate approximate attributes for each relevant telephone

⁷ The website location is <u>http://downloads2.esri.com/support/whitepapers/ao_/J9509_ESRI_DataandMaps2006.pdf</u>.

area code zone. Basically, by overlaying the telephone area code boundaries with the county boundaries we can visually identify the composition of each telephone area code zone (or polygon in GIS terms) by the counties involved (also polygons). Thus, we can roughly aggregate the county level data into telephone area level attributes. For example, if telephone area code 555 (hypothetical) roughly corresponds to the combination of two adjoining counties A and B, then we can sum up the attributes for county A and B, such as population size and number of businesses, and the totals will become the attributes for telephone area code 555. However, this procedure can be complicated by the fact that sometimes a county polygon is not entirely contained within a single telephone area code, but instead being split between more than one telephone area code zones. For example, county C may cross over telephone area code 555 and 666. In that case, we will have to split the attributes (such as population size, etc.) of county C proportionally according to the area distribution of county C polygon between telephone area code 555 and 666 (it is possible that there is GIS application to compute the precise allocation of county C spatial size between telephone area code 555 and 666, but the proportional allocation of the polygon attributes such as population has to be done manually). Whether it is combining or splitting the county attributes, this process is largely a manual process that ultimately aims to create telephone area code level data. Using this method, we can "convert" all county level data into telephone area code data file. We note that this data management step is also necessary for our next stage of analysis.

(2) Statistical Models of Location Choices of Chinese Restaurants Using Area Code Data

Following the procedure described above, we will obtain area code level data file that contains distribution of Chinese restaurants in each area code as well as basic economic, business pattern, and crime data at the area code level. Our dependent variable is number of Chinese restaurants in an area code zone. Count data are usually estimated by Poisson model or negative binomial model (Long, 1997). Poisson distribution is more restrictive than negative binomial model because of its assumption of mean equals to variance. As the count of Chinese restaurants in area code zone are skewed (with many zeros because some area codes may not contain Chinese restaurants) and may be overdispersed, we will use negative binomial distribution (Long, 1997). The statistical model will take the following form:

$$\ln \bar{Y} = \alpha + \beta X$$

where \hat{Y} represents predicted counts of number of Chinese enterprises and X is a vector that includes are code level variables, i.e. median income, poverty level, business growth rate, population, and Asian American population size (logged),⁸ and crime rate.

Preliminary results

Map 1 shows the distribution of jobs obtained from our employment agency survey in NYC. As we can see the job distribution clearly spreads widely across the United States. We identify job frequency by different colors, with red color indicating largest number of jobs, followed by blue, green and orange. Overall, these job listings spread across 37 states. We use classification method of Massey (2008): big five, second tier, new destinations, and remaining states. States with diagonal stripes indicate new destinations and traditional destination states are in dark color. Using Massey's classification scheme, jobs in new destinations and remaining states represent a combined 56% of the job listings. This reveals a very dramatic geographic diversification of restaurant job locations and high concentration of jobs in non-gateway destinations in the United States.

One of the advantages of working in traditional destinations for immigrants is that these locations tend to be in large cities with easy access to transportations. However, with large

⁸ Note that ideally we want to use count of Chinese American population in each county/area code zone, but this is not available. Thus we use count of Asian American population as approximation and realize its limitation.

numbers of newly arrived immigrants work in these far away locations and rural towns, transportation can be a challenge. Chinese businessmen are quick to start new business to serve the need of immigrants. While conducting fieldwork of employment agencies, we also found large stacks of business cards from bus companies in Chinatown (these days located mainly along Allen Street). We systematically collected all bus information from each employment agency. There are two major bus services, one is mainly for short distance (to Boston, Philadelphia, or Albany), but majority of them are for long distance. We have identified three major bus routes that serve the need of immigrants. Map 2-4 show three major buy routes. Map 2 shows the bus route that goes along the east coast with final destination of Orlando. The second bus route goes to mid-west with final destination of Kansas city. The third line goes to the deep south, with final destination of Birmingham, Alabama.

We have conducted initial analysis of determinants of job distributions by area code. We use some basic area code level characterizes; income, unemployment rate, crime rate, proportion non-Hispanic whites and proportion blacks. The results are reported in Table 1. Consistent with our expectation, these restaurant jobs tend to be located in areas with low unemployment rate (though not statistically significant). Restaurant owners tend to start businesses in low crime rate areas, the coefficient for crime rate is very significant. Not surprisingly, these jobs tend to be located in areas with high proportion of Non-Hispanic whites, often associated with higher or middle income neighborhood. However, we also find that jobs are also likely to be located in areas with high proportion of blacks as well. This is in line with other literature shows immigrant business owners often venture into minority neighborhood to start business (Min, 2004). We have carried out some preliminary fieldwork in a neighborhood in Philadelphia and find that large numbers of Chinese restaurants are located in this poor neighborhood. In fact, along the metro line, there is a Chinese restaurant in each street. These are for the most part take-out restaurants. Unlike other take-out Chinese restaurants, the ones in

this neighborhood all have bullet-proof window and cash transaction is conducted in a manner that is similar to bank transactions in major cities.

We also used salary information from employment agency survey to get a sense of how salary is related to new destinations. The substantive question is do immigrants receive higher compensation once they move out of NYC? We create a distance measure between Manhattan and each of phone area code. Our initial analysis suggests, the further away from Manhattan, the higher the salary. In fact, if we consider non-gateway locations are often less costly and employers always provide room and board, immigrants who work in non-gateway destinations clearly reap high level of financial gains.

In next few months, we plan to conduct following further analysis. Consider other area code level variables such as business environment, if the area has Asian restaurants, and explore other variables as well. In addition, we plan to conduct spatial data analysis, taking into account potential autocorrelation among our spatial unit and identify any potential spatial clustering effect. In addition, we will analyze determinant of salary in a more systematic way, taking into account account not only distance to Manhattan, but local area characteristics as well.



Map 1. Job distribution by phone area code



Map 2 Bus Route from NYC, NY to Orlando, FL



Map 3 Bus Route from NYC, NY to Kansas City, KS



Map 4 Bus Route from NYC, NY to Alabama

Independent Variables	В	SE
Intercept	1452	.9555
Personal Income	2.92e-06	.0000
Unemployment Rate	-35.9829	20.5510
Non-Hispanic White proportion	3.7809	*** .6416
Black Proportion	9.3523	*** 1.2319
Crime Rate	-27.3803	*** 8.1686
-2 Log Likelihood Chi-Square df	1510.544 62.71 5	
Number of cases Note: * P < 0.05, ** P < 0.01 and ***<0.001	274	

Table 1. Coefficients of Negative Binomial Regression Predicting Job Number in Area Code

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