Global Delay Optimization using Structural Choices

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Abstract

This paper presents a fast global method for delay optimization after technology mapping. Timing analysis is used to identify timing-critical areas in the mapped network where new structures are synthesized to favor late-arriving signals. Unlike previous methods that make incremental local changes to the mapped network, the proposed method records the alternative structures and defers the final decision to the technology mapper. Experimental results for networks mapped into 6-input look-up tables (6-LUTs) show that the delay is on average improved 23% using the unit-delay model, and 14% using a realistic delay library for LUTs with variable-pin delays and wire-delay estimation. The area penalty after the delay optimization is about 2% and can be eliminated by area-oriented resynthesis. The algorithm is fast and applicable to very large networks.

1 Introduction

Technology mapping transforms a technology-independent logic network, called the *subject graph*, into a network of logic nodes, which correspond to primitives in a particular technology. For example, technology mapping for FPGAs [6][5] expressed the network using *K*-input lookup tables (*K*-LUTs), each of which can implement any Boolean function of *K* or less variables. The subject graph is often represented as an And-Inverter Graph (AIG) composed of two-input ANDs and inverters.

Logic restructuring with the goal of reducing delay of a mapped network has long been an important part of both technology independent [17][2][10][16] and technology dependent synthesis [8][11][7][4]. However, existing methods for delay-oriented logic restructuring have the following drawbacks:

- Numerous local changes to the network may be performed, but with no guarantee that the delay is globally improved or that area has been effectively spent for delay improvements.
- Algorithms of high computational complexity are often used, leading to excessive runtime. Much effort is spent on deciding where to make the changes.
- Structural flexibilities that may be available during mapping are typically not used during post-mapping resynthesis.

The proposed method mitigates these limitations. It is simple, fast, easy to implement, and gives excellent results. Unlike the previous methods, it does not perform a sequence of local changes, each one updating the mapped network and running incremental timing analysis after each change. The new method need not analyze cuts of a set of critical paths nor distribute slacks on off-critical paths. Instead, it computes timing information for the mapped network only once. The timing information is analyzed and a set of new candidate structures, a subset of which may lead to reducing delay after the next iteration of mapping, are recorded in the subject graph using choice nodes [8][3].

Decisions about which subset of structures to use are deferred to the technology mapper. The motivation is that the mapper has a global picture of delay and area, as well as a good view of structural flexibilities presented during mapping, and thus can better decide what structures to use.

The new logic structures are created by cofactoring logic cones, in timing critical regions, with respect to timing-critical variables. The cofactors are combined using multiplexers controlled by the critical variables, resulting in a logic structure that pushes the late-arriving variables towards the outputs. A similar method was discussed in [2] and called the generalized select transform (GST) [10][16]. The same simple and effective method was recently used for timing optimization of sequential circuits [18]. The proposed algorithm can be extended to work for the sequential case as well.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 describes the background. Section 3 describes the algorithm. Section 4 reports experimental results. Section 5 concludes the paper and outlines future work.

2 Background

A *Boolean network* is a directed acyclic graph (DAG) with nodes corresponding to logic gates and directed edges corresponding to wires connecting the gates. The terms Boolean network, netlist, and circuit are used interchangeably in this paper. If the network is sequential, the memory elements are assumed to be D-flip-flops with initial states.

A node *n* has zero or more *fanins,* i.e. nodes that are driving *n*, and zero or more *fanouts*, i.e. nodes driven by *n*. The *primary inputs* (PIs) are nodes without fanins in the current network. The *primary outputs* (POs) are a subset of nodes of the network. If the network is sequential, it contains registers whose inputs and output are treated as additional PIs/POs in combinational optimization and mapping. A *fanin* (*fanout*) *cone* of node *n* is a subset of all nodes of the network, reachable through the fanin (fanout) edges from the given node.

A *node* is a logic component having a signal propagation delay, for example, a node can be a LUT used in FPGAs. An *edge*, also called *wire*, is the pin-to-pin connection between two adjacent nodes. For example, in Figure 2.0, connection *n2→o1* is an edge. A *path* is a route from a PI to a PO through nodes/edges. For example, route *b→n1→n3→o1* is a path. A *net* is the set of edges with the same fanin. For example, net *n2* has two edges, *n2→o1* and *n2→n4*.

The delay of a path includes *logic delays* and *wire delays*. The *logic delay* occurs in a logic component, such as a LUT. The *wire delay* occurs in edges. Traditionally, when the unit-delay model is used, logic delay is set to be 1.0. However, in modern FPGAs,

since the delay for each pin in a LUT is different, a unit-delay model is not good for timing estimation. Therefore, a variable-pin-delay model is used in this paper. Wire delays are usually not known until placement and routing are done. To approximate wire delays in this paper, a fixed delay value is added to the delay of all pins of the LUTs in the library.

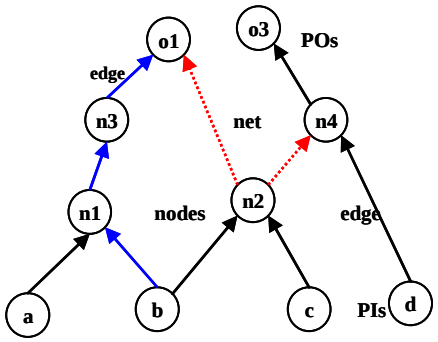

Figure 2.0. Illustration of node, path, edge, and net.

3 Proposed algorithm

A self-explanatory pseudo-code is given in Figure 3.0. The algorithm takes the mapped netlist and the subject graph used for mapping. The netlist is analyzed to detect timing-critical areas for logic restructuring while the subject graph is used to accumulate the alternative logic structures for the next round of mapping. Several parameters are used in the computation: the timing window (w) determines the range of slacks of the nearly-timing-critical nodes to be restructured; the logic depth (l) of cones selected for delay-oriented restructuring; and the limit (p) on the number of timing-critical edges of the cone to consider.

```
mapped netlist performSpeedup (
   subject graph S,     // S is an And-Inverter Graph
   mapped netlist M, // M was previously derived by tech-mapping of S
   timing window w, // w is used to detect the critical path
   logic depth l,       // l is used to detect a logic cone rooted at a node
   edge count p         // p limits the number critical edges of the cone
{
   perform timing analysis of M with unit-delay or LUT-library model;
   detect the critical section of M as nodes n such that 0 ≤ slack(n) ≤ w;
   detect timing-critical edges connecting these nodes;
   for each timing critical node n
   {
      find cone C of M that extends l levels down from n;
      detect the set of timing-critical edges V feeding into C;
      if the number of edges in V exceeds p
         continue;
      find logic cone C' in S corresponding to C in M;
      find variables V' in S corresponding to V in M;
      derive cofactors of the function of C' w.r.t. variables in V';
      build multiplexer tree C'' of the cofactors using variables in V';
      add structural choice C' = C'' to the subject graph S;
   }
   derive netlist M' by mapping subject graph S with added choices;
   return M';
}
```

Figure 3.0. Overall pseudo-code of the algorithm.

The following subsections provide the details on timing analysis and identification of timing-critical edges (Section 3.1), logic restructuring for delay (Section 3.2), and using structural choices in technology mapping (Section 3.3).

3.1 Timing analysis

The purpose of *timing analysis* is to find out the *critical nodes* and *critical edges* by running a *delay trace*. Timing analysis for a mapped netlist consists in computing arrival times, required times, and slacks of all nodes and edges in the netlist. An *arrival time* of a node is the longest time for a signal to travel from a PI to the node. A *required time* of a node is the latest time for the node to produce its value, so that when it propagates to the POs, their arrival times do not exceed the delay requirements.

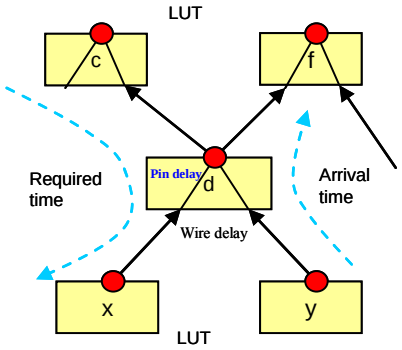

Figure 3.1.1. Illustration of pin/wire delay and delay trace.

Timing analysis is performed in two passes over the mapped netlist. In the first pass, the arrival times are computed for each node and its fanin edges in a topological order from the PIs to the POs. The arrival time of an edge is the arrival time of its driving (fanin) node plus pin and wire delay. The concepts are illustrated in Figures 3.1.1 and 3.1.2. For unit-delay, wire delay is 0 and pin delay is 1. The arrival time of a node is the maximum arrival time of its fanin edges. For example, the arrival time of edge $x \rightarrow d$ is the wire and pin delay of LUT d. The value is 1.0 if the unit-delay model is used. At the end of this pass, if there are no user-specified global delay requirements, the largest arrival time at a PO is set as the global delay requirement.

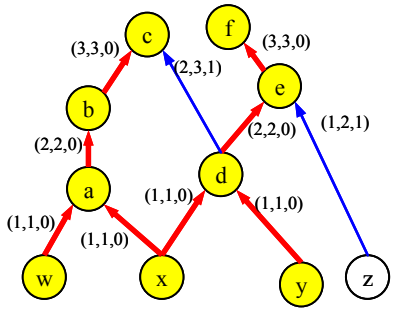

Figure 3.1.2. Illustration of the case when the edge between two timing-cricial nodes is not timing-critical.

In the second pass, the required times are propagated in a reverse topological order from the POs to the PIs. The required time of an edge is the required time of its fanout node minus the pin and wire delay. The required time of a node is the minimum required time of its fanout edges. For example, the required time of edge $d \rightarrow c$ is 2 and the required time of $d \rightarrow e$ is 1, if the unit-delay mode is used. Therefore, the required time for node d is 1.

The *slack* of a node (edge) is the difference between the required time and the arrival time at the node (edge). Nodes (edges) with the slack close to zero are called *timing-critical*. In

Figure 3.1.2, all shaded nodes are critical. Only node *z* is non-critical. All edges are annotated with the triples (arrival, required, slack). The *critical edges* are bold edges shown in red. A path is a *critical path* if all the edges on the path are critical. For example, $x \rightarrow a \rightarrow b \rightarrow c$ is a critical path and $x \rightarrow d \rightarrow c$ is not a critical because $d \rightarrow c$ is not critical. In Figure 3.1.2, there are four critical paths: $x \rightarrow a \rightarrow b \rightarrow c$, $w \rightarrow a \rightarrow b \rightarrow c$, $x \rightarrow d \rightarrow e \rightarrow f$, and $y \rightarrow d \rightarrow e \rightarrow f$. Delay optimization can be achieved by restructuring logic cones rooted at the nodes on the critical paths.

A *timing-critical edge* is an edge, i.e., a fanin/fanout connection between two timing-critical nodes, such that reducing the arrival time of the fanin is necessary (but not sufficient) to reduce the arrival time of the fanout. Note that not every edge between two timing-critical nodes is timing-critical. For example, Figure 3.1.2 shows that both node *d* and node *c* are timing-critical. However, edge $d \rightarrow c$ is not timing-critical because the arrival time of *c* can be reduced from 3 to 2 by restructuring the timing path $a \rightarrow b \rightarrow c$, without reducing the arrival time of node *d*.

3.2 Logic restructuring for delay

Cone selection for logic structuring is governed by several heuristics aimed at maximizing the chances of improving delay.

For each timing-critical node, we consider one cone rooted in the given node and reaching a fixed amount of logic levels towards the PIs. Considering more than one cone can lead to a large number of structural choices, which may degrade the quality of mapping. Limiting the number of levels of logic included in the cone prevents restructuring from duplicating too much area.

If the cone has more than a fixed number *p* (say, p=2) of timing-critical edges, it is not considered because restructuring of this cone cannot give delay improvement. This is because the tree of 2:1 MUXes added on top to assemble the cofactors has a delay that may offset the gains due to restructuring.

Finally, the timing-critical edges of the cone are ordered in the decreasing order of criticality. The variables corresponding to these edges are used for cofactoring and become control variables of the MUXes. The more timing-critical is a variable, the closer to the output of the cone it ends up after restructuring. For example, if variable *x* arrives later than *y*, it is used to control the top-most multiplexer on the right of Figure 3.2.

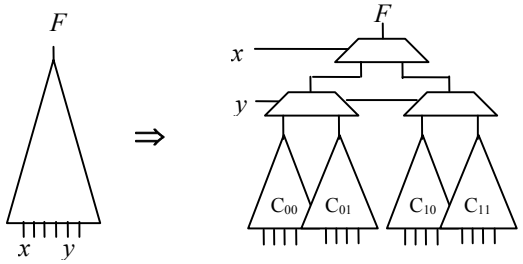

Figure 3.2. Illustration of the delay-oriented restructuring.

3.3 Adding choices and re-mapping

Multiple logic structures can be recorded in the AIG using structural choices. A *structural choice* is a set of AIG nodes that are functionally equivalent, up to complementation. The first node in the topological order among those belonging to the set is called the *representative*. The representative is the only node in the set that has fanouts. In the implementation of the AIG package, each node belonging to a choice uses two additional pointers: the first pointer gives the representative while the second is used to link-list the nodes belonging to the same choice.

The choices added by the proposed delay-optimization algorithm are AIG structures derived by cofactoring with respect to timing-critical nodes. Given an AIG cone with *N* timing-critical nodes, 2^N cofactors are computed. Next, a 2^N-to-1 MUX is created with the cofactors as data-inputs and the cofactoring variables as controls, as shown in Figure 3.2. The root AIG node of the MUX is added as a choice of the root of the original cone. Structural hashing of the AIGs quickly removes structurally equivalent parts of the cofactor logic cones. Since logic synthesis and mapping are often iterated, a more elaborate logic synthesis of the cofactor logic cones is deferred till after the next round of synthesis.

Structural technology mapping for FPGA was pioneered in [6]. Technology mapping with structural choices was introduced in [8] and further developed in [3]. In the latter case, the subject graph is an AIG and efficient equivalence checking [9][12][13] is used to detect functionally-equivalent nodes.

To make the presentation self-contained, here is an overview of technology mapping with structural choices, as presented in [3]. To use structural choices, only one aspect of the mapper needs to be modified, namely, cut enumeration. Whether complete [15] or partial [14] cut enumeration is used, the cuts are computed in a topological order, by merging fanins' cut sets to produce the cut set of the node. In the presence of structural choices, the cut set of the representative node is computed as the union of cut sets of other nodes in this choice. Recall that only the representative has fanout. Therefore, cuts computed for all nodes in a choice are propagated to the fanouts through the representative.

The arrival time of a cut needs to be changed. In [14], since the unit-delay model is used, the arrival time of a cut is computed using the maximum logic level of fanin cuts and plus one.

Since we are aiming at the best delay for the variable pin-delay model, the following heuristic is used. We assume earliest arriving fanin of a LUT is assigned to the slowest pin, the second-earliest fanin of a LUT to the second-slowest pin, etc. In this case, we can sort the fanins by arrival time and assume that they are feeding into LUTs in this order.

The advantage of using choices is that technology mapping can favor delay-oriented choices on the critical path and area-oriented choices elsewhere. The total number of different structures explored is exponential in the number of choices because decisions at each choice are made independently by the mapper.

4 Experimental results

The proposed delay-optimization algorithm was implemented as command *speedup* in ABC [1]. Mapping was performed by the priority-cut-based LUT-mapper [14] (command *if*). The resulting networks have been verified using a SAT-based combinational equivalence checker [13] (command *cec*). The experiments targeting FPGAs with 6-LUTs were run on an Intel Xeon 2-CPU 4-core computer with 8Gb RAM.

The LUT libraries for $K = 6$ used in the experiments are shown in Figures 4.1-4.3 using the ABC LUT-library format. The LUT sizes, listed first on each line, should be in increasing order. Listed next is the LUT area followed by the delays of each pin of the LUT, also in the increasing order. There are as many delay number as there are pins of the given LUT.

Figure 4.1 shows a unit-area unit-delay LUT model. A variable-pin-delay LUT library is in Figure 4.2. To make mapping more realistic, a constant value (0.2) is added to all the pin delays to simulate the delay in the wires, resulting in the library shown in Figure 4.3. If this value is not added, two 2-LUTs are faster than

one 4-LUT, which is not true in practice. It can be observed that, with the increase of the added value, the variable-pin-delay library begins to resemble the unit-area unit-delay library.

Two experiments on 30 industrial benchmarks ranging in size from 1K to 50K 6-LUTs are reported in Tables 4.1-4.2. Table 4.1 shows the results for the unit-delay library (Figure 4.1). Table 4.2 shows the results the variable-pin-delay library (Figure 4.3).

The following notation used in the tables: columns denoted "PI", "PO", and "Reg" list the number of primary inputs, primary outputs, and registers in the design. Columns "LUT", "Lev", and "Delay" report the number of 6-LUTs, the number of logic levels and the delay using variable-pin delay model. Finally, columns "Time1" and "Time2" give the runtime, in seconds, of command *speedup* and of the total synthesis/mapping flow, respectively.

The baseline synthesis/mapping flow reported in the tables is done by the script: (*st; dchoice; if -C* 16 *-F* 2)^8, where the exponent (here, 8) shows how many times the script is iterated. At the end of the script, the best result is selected among the results observed at the end of each iteration. Delay-optimization (Section "Speedup") was applied after the baseline mapping, using the script: (*st; dchoice; if -C* 16 *-F* 2)^4 (*speedup; if -C* 16 *-F* 2)^3 (*st; dchoice; if -C* 16 *-F* 2)^4. The three iterations of *speedup* were performed with parameter *p* equal to 1, 2, and 3, respectively.

```
1   1.0   1.0
2   1.0   1.0 1.0
3   1.0   1.0 1.0 1.0
4   1.0   1.0 1.0 1.0 1.0
5   1.0   1.0 1.0 1.0 1.0 1.0
6   1.0   1.0 1.0 1.0 1.0 1.0 1.0
```

Figure 4.1. The unit-delay LUT library.

```
1   1.0   0.2
2   1.0   0.2 0.3
3   1.0   0.2 0.3 0.4
4   1.0   0.2 0.3 0.4 0.45
5   1.0   0.2 0.3 0.4 0.45 0.55
6   1.0   0.2 0.3 0.4 0.45 0.55 0.65
```

Figure 4.2. A variable-pin-delay LUT library.

```
1   1.0   0.4
2   1.0   0.4 0.5
3   1.0   0.4 0.5 0.6
4   1.0   0.4 0.5 0.6 0.65
5   1.0   0.4 0.5 0.6 0.65 0.75
6   1.0   0.4 0.5 0.6 0.65 0.75 0.85
```

Figure 4.3. A variable-pin-delay LUT library with wire-delays.

The experimental results show that the delay was on average reduced by 23% and 14% using the unit-delay and the variable-pin-delay models, respectively. In both cases, area was increased by 2%. In a separate experiment, which is not shown in the tables, the area increase was prevented by several iterations of area-oriented resynthesis (commands *mfs* and *lutpack* in ABC).

The runtime of command *speedup* is about 10-12% of the total runtime of the delay-optimization flow. The total runtime of this flow is dominated by command *dchoice*, which performs 15 iterations of AIG-based logic synthesis, saves three snapshots of the network, derives structural choices, and uses them for technology mapping performed by command *if*. The total runtime the delay-optimization flow is roughly the same as that of the baseline plus the runtime of command *speedup.* This is because the number of additional choices produced by *speedup* is relatively small and does not impact the runtime of mapping. The total runtime of delay optimization, which included 8 iterations of *dchoice* and 3 iterations of *speedup*, was about 6 minutes for the largest reported benchmark with 50K 6-LUTs.

5 Conclusions and future work

This paper proposes a simple, fast, and efficient algorithm for improving delay after technology mapping. This algorithm builds on the substantial progress achieved recently by the synergy of AIG-based synthesis, equivalence checking [12], and technology mapping [14] as implemented in ABC [1]. The generalized select transform (GST) [2][10][18] is used to create alternatives for speeding up a circuit but these are not used immediately for delay optimization. The location where these additional structures are created is therefore not as critical as in classical methods because their use is postponed till the next round of mapping. By iterating the algorithm and technology mapping several times, subsequent delay improvements can be obtained. Surprisingly, this led to relatively little area increase, probably because the mapper was able to make good choices between area and delay tradeoffs.

Future work may include: (a) measuring the improvements in delay after place-and-route, (b) extending the algorithm to work for sequential circuits, and (c) applying similar optimization for cost functions other than delay.

Acknowledgements

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Table 4.1. Experimental evaluation of *speedup* on industrial circuits using unit-delay model.

Design	**Profile**			**Baseline**			**Speedup**			
	PI	**PO**	**Reg**	**LUT**	**Lev**	**T, total**	**LUT**	**Lev**	**Time1, s**	**Time2, s**
1	2,420	1,243	1,963	4,941	17	40.82	5,145	10	4.56	46.54
2	13,827	9,528	7,111	19,040	16	114.95	19,108	15	13.97	129.45
3	37	28	9,829	11,643	8	48.56	11,922	7	11.42	60.97
4	643	918	7,177	9,047	8	33.38	9,149	5	4.23	38.46
5	8,927	10,761	26,246	38,687	8	151.09	38,947	5	21.23	171.51
6	378	395	1,297	3,187	6	20.42	3,280	5	3.63	24.13
7	730	583	3,330	5,511	14	37.04	5,761	12	5.92	44.57
8	367	154	2,606	5,314	11	37.08	5,299	11	4.13	41.10
9	966	1,434	12,733	18,235	7	86.77	18,244	7	10.75	96.87
10	2,061	1,897	13,950	16,277	7	78.15	16,160	6	11.87	91.24
11	2,061	1,897	13,950	16,277	7	80.38	16,160	6	12.07	93.50
12	50	68	1,358	3,266	18	24.60	3,321	14	3.93	28.95
13	1,044	1,098	2,074	7,142	21	78.70	7,746	12	7.92	85.83
14	391	129	1,049	7,618	10	256.94	7,818	9	37.03	298.9
15	749	777	7,348	15,836	9	168.86	15,944	8	23.64	193.65
16	1,041	736	1,063	3,491	10	20.05	3,550	9	3.14	23.32
17	3,512	2,992	3,425	12,500	17	178.62	12,837	14	15.25	200.81
18	11,456	10,791	10,114	27,498	15	165.87	28,374	9	24.89	191.28
19	11,292	11,454	20,184	49,801	11	322.57	50,292	7	40.98	363.16
20	2,578	2,453	7967	13,800	8	73.60	14,112	4		83.73
Geomean				**10,719**	**10.63**	**73.44**	**10,925**	**8.15**	**10.09**	**84.53**
Ratio 1				**1**	**1**		**1.019**	**0.767**		
Ratio 2									**0.119**	**1**

Table 4.2. Experimental evaluation of *speedup* on industrial circuits using variable-pin delay model.

Design	**Profile**			**Baseline**				**Speedup**				
	PI	**PO**	**Reg**	**LUT**	**Lev**	**Delay**	**Total**	**LUT**	**Lev**	**Delay**	**Time1, s**	**Time2, s**
1	2,420	1,243	1,963	4,956	17	7.00	40.28	5,175	11	4.80	4.12	45.79
2	13,827	9,528	7,111	19,222	18	7.45	113.52	19,349	17	7.25	14.32	128.35
3	37	28	9,829	11,775	8	3.65	47.00	12,134	8	3.50	8.92	57.38
4	643	918	7,177	9,056	8	3.65	32.97	9,172	6	2.70	4.13	37.92
5	8,927	10,761	26,246	38,734	8	3.45	151.46	39,030	7	3.05	17.77	171.06
6	378	395	1,297	3,289	6	2.85	19.56	3,282	6	2.85	2.60	22.55
7	730	583	3,330	5,532	16	6.70	36.66	5,859	14	6.35	5.87	43.06
8	367	154	2,606	5,371	14	5.85	36.66	5,403	12	5.35	4.11	40.97
9	966	1,434	12,733	18,258	8	3.75	88.15	18,302	8	3.45	10.62	97.65
10	2,061	1,897	13,950	16,531	7	3.15	77.38	16,652	7	2.95	9.16	85.48
11	2,061	1,897	13,950	16,531	7	3.15	77.70	16,652	7	2.95	9.33	87.95
12	50	68	1,358	3,284	19	8.40	23.88	3,371	16	7.00	3.46	28.68
13	1,044	1,098	2,074	7,147	23	9.35	74.39	7,789	16	6.65	7.37	86.71
14	391	129	1,049	7,526	14	6.05	251.11	7,573	14	6.05	27.29	280.41
15	749	777	7,348	16,086	10	4.35	169.25	16,097	9	4.00	18.48	188.00
16	1,041	736	1,063	3,611	11	4.70	19.63	3,621	11	4.65	2.77	22.71
17	3,512	2,992	3,425	12,533	20	8.45	178.58	12,830	17	7.40	13.19	199.36
18	11,456	10,791	10,114	27,622	15	6.25	160.22	28,857	10	4.35	22.29	184.63
19	11,292	11,454	20,184	49,871	12	5.00	317.79	50,283	9	3.75	37.83	355.19
20	131	129	26258	13,811	8	3.65	72.17	14,186	5	2.45	8.23	81.60
Geomean				**10,804**	**11.49**	**4.99**	**72.13**	**11,023**	**9.80**	**4.29**	**8.77**	**82.29**
Ratio 1				**1**	**1**	**1**		**1.020**	**0.854**	**0.860**		
Ratio 2											**0.107**	**1**