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Incomplete contracts and the boundaries of the multinational firm☆

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ABSTRACT

Using data on U.S. intra-firm and arm's-length imports for 5705 products imported from 220 countries, we examine the determinants of the share of U.S. imports that are intra-firm. We examine two predictions that arise from Antràs (2003), Antràs and Helpman (2008) and Antràs and Helpman (2004). First, we find that, consistent with the implicit logic of Antràs (2003) and the explicit predictions of Antràs and Helpman (2008), vertical integration is increasing in the importance of *non-contractible* headquarter inputs relative to *non-contractible* supplier inputs. In other words, we show that only non-contractible headquarter inputs affect the firm's make-or-buy decision. Second, we also provide empirical support for the Antràs and Helpman (2004) prediction that intra-firm trade is largest where *non-contractible* headquarter inputs are important *and* productivity is high.

1. Introduction

Recently, a rich research agenda examining the determinants of intra-firm trade has developed. The literature has been able to develop deep insights into the multinational firms' decision regarding the elements of international trade that are done internally to the firm and which are done outside the boundaries of the firm.[1] In this paper, we are interested in a strand of the literature that examines the relationship between a multinational firm and its supplier. Each contributes a customized input that is non-contractible. As a result, there is a classic hold-up problem and the multinational must decide whether to vertically integrate its supplier or outsource to its supplier. One strand of the literature treats the difference between these two organizational forms as the difference between the outside options of the multinational in the event that the hold-up problem cannot be resolved through bargaining. This treatment of the difference between vertical integration and outsourcing originates with Antràs (2003) and appears again in Antràs and Helpman (2004, 2008).

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[1] Seminal contributions include McLaren (2000), Antràs (2003, 2005), Grossman and Helpman (2002, 2003, 2004, 2005), and Antràs and Helpman (2004).

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These papers yield two important insights about the determinants of the share of total U.S. imports that are imported by U.S. multinationals from their foreign affiliates (i.e., intra-firm). First, Antràs (2003) argues that when the U.S. headquarters firm provides the bulk of the non-contractible inputs, underinvestment in inputs is reduced by highly incentivizing the headquarter. Vertical integration provides such incentives because it allows the headquarter to control at least some of the supplier's inputs even if bilateral bargaining breaks down. In contrast, when the foreign supplier provides the bulk of the non-contractible inputs, the foreign supplier must be highly incentivized. This is done by outsourcing: outsourcing strips the headquarters firm of any control over the supplier's inputs and thus strengthens the bilateral bargaining position of the supplier. In short, the share of U.S. imports that are intra-firm is increasing in the share of (non-contractible) inputs provided by the U.S. headquarters firm.[2]

While Antràs (2003) examines the simplified case where all inputs are non-contractible, Antràs and Helpman (2008) allow a portion of the inputs to be contractible. (An alternative interpretation is that they allow all inputs to be partially contractible.) Because Antràs (2003) assumes all inputs were non-contractible, in his model what matters is the relative importance of total headquarter-provided inputs relative to supplier inputs. However, as Antràs and Helpman (2008) illustrate, when some investments are contractible it is now only necessary to incentivize the non-contractible investments. Therefore, what matters is the importance of non-contractible headquarter investments relative to non-contractible supplier investments.

The second prediction about the share of total U.S. imports that is intra-firm is developed in Antràs and Helpman (2004). The authors start with the well-known fact that firms display heterogeneous productivities. They then argue that the fixed costs of producing abroad are lower when outsourcing to a foreign supplier than when using foreign direct investment (vertical integration). Since only the most productive firms capture the market share needed to offset the high costs of vertical integration, not all firms identified by Antràs (2003) as candidates for vertical integration will in fact integrate. Only the most productive will. Thus, the share of U.S. imports that are intra-firm will be large when two conditions are simultaneously satisfied: (i) the share of inputs provided by the headquarters firm is large (as in Antràs, 2003) and (ii) firm productivity is high.

Using data on U.S. intra-firm and arm's-length imports for 5705 products imported from 220 countries, we examine these determinants of the share of U.S. imports that are intra-firm. Our conclusions mirror the two predictions listed above. (i) In terms of the Antràs (2003) and Antràs and Helpman (2008) mechanism, we find support for the role of the importance of non-contractible headquarter inputs relative to non-contractible supplier inputs. (ii) We also find strong support for the Antràs and Helpman (2004) prediction that intra-firm trade is largest where headquarter inputs are important *and* productivity is high.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 examines the predictions of Antràs (2003) and Antràs and Helpman (2008), and Section 3 examines the predictions from Antràs and Helpman (2004). Section 4 concludes.

2. The boundary of the firm and the role of η (Antràs, 2003; Antràs and Helpman, 2008)

We begin by reviewing the salient features of the Antràs (2003) and Antràs and Helpman (2004, 2008) models from the perspective of the empirical work to follow. Since the models have been presented and summarized elsewhere, we only review its most important features here.[3]

A U.S. firm produces a brand of a differentiated variety j of a product in industry i. Demand is generated by CES preferences. To produce the good, the firm must use two inputs, those produced by the U.S. firm ($h_i(j)$ for *h*eadquarters) and those produced by a foreign supplier ($m_i(j)$ for inter*m*ediates). Output of the final good is given by a Cobb–Douglas production function with two key parameters: a Hicks-neutral productivity parameter $\theta(j)$ that is variety (i.e., match) specific and the cost share of the input provided by the firm η_i, which is an industry-specific parameter. Specifically, production is given by:

$$q_i(j) = \theta(j)\left(\frac{h_i(j)}{\eta_i}\right)^{\eta_i}\left(\frac{m_i(j)}{1-\eta_i}\right)^{1-\eta_i}. \qquad (1)$$

In Antràs (2003) and Antràs and Helpman (2004) it is assumed that the two inputs are entirely customized and not contractible. This assumption is relaxed in Antràs and Helpman (2008). Customization raises quality to a threshold which allows the final good to be sold to consumers. Unfortunately, for the U.S. firm and its foreign supplier, the investments in customization are non-contractible and they have no value outside of the relationship. Thus, there is a standard hold-up problem. After the investments in customization have been made there is renegotiation over how the *ex post* quasi-rents from the relationship will be shared.

The timing of the game played by the U.S. firm and its foreign supplier is as follows. After the two parties match, the U.S. firm chooses the organizational form. Then investments in customized inputs are made. Finally, the initial contract is renegotiated and, if there is agreement, the product is sold.

Let β be the generalized Nash share of the *ex post* quasi-rents from the relationship that go to the U.S. firm. The U.S. firm receives this share plus its outside option. The organizational form – vertical integration versus outsourcing – chosen by the

[2] This logic is a specific instance of the larger property rights approach to the firm e.g., Grossman and Hart (1986).
[3] See Helpman (2006) and Nunn and Trefler (2008).

headquarter alters the outside option of the U.S. firm. Regardless of the organizational form, the supplier earns nothing and its outside option is 0. This is also the case for the U.S. firm under outsourcing. However, for a headquarter that has vertically integrated with its supplier, if bargaining breaks down, then the headquarter can still produce some output by 'forcing' its now-disgruntled supplier to do at least some work. Vertical integration is therefore a way for the firm to improve its outside option.

This difference in the headquarter's outside options under the two organizational forms leads to a trade-off. Although vertical integration allows the firm to grab a larger share of the pie, it also potentially leads to a smaller pie because of increased underinvestment by the supplier. This is modeled mathematically as follows. Let $k = V, O$ subscripts denote the organizational form with V for vertical integration and O for outsourcing. Recall that β is the share of the *ex post* quasi-rents that goes to the firm. Let $R_k(j)$ be the revenue generated when there is an agreement. If there is no agreement the firm can only sell a portion δ of the final output. With CES preferences and constant markup $1/\alpha$, this generates a revenue of $\delta^\alpha R_V(j)$. Therefore, the firm receives its outside option $\delta^\alpha R_V(j)$ plus a share β of the quasi-rents $(R_V(j) - \delta^\alpha R_V(j))$. That is, the firm receives $[\delta^\alpha + \beta(1-\delta^\alpha)]R_V(j)$. Let $\beta_V = \delta^\alpha + \beta(1-\delta^\alpha)$ be the firm's share of revenues under vertical integration. Under outsourcing, the outside option is 0 and the quasi-rents are $R_O(j)$ so that the firm receives $0 + \beta(R_O(j) - 0) = \beta R_O(j)$. Let $\beta_O = \beta$ be the firm's share of total revenues under outsourcing. The upshot of all this is the central result that the organizational form alters the U.S. firm's share of revenue. In particular, $\beta_V > \beta_O$.

Both the U.S. firm and the foreign supplier invest and hence each must worry about the other's underinvestment. Where η_i is large, the surplus generated by the relationship is particularly sensitive to the amount of investment undertaken by the U.S. firm. To reduce the degree of underinvestment by the U.S. firm, the firm must be given a large share of the revenue. This share is largest under vertical integration because $\beta_V > \beta_O$. This is a specific instance of the Grossman and Hart (1986) property-rights theory of the firm where residual control rights are allocated to the U.S. firm. In contrast, when η_i is small, the surplus generated by the relationship is particularly sensitive to the amount of investment undertaken by the supplier. To reduce supplier underinvestment, the supplier must be given a large share of the revenue. Outsourcing accomplishes this because $1-\beta_O > 1-\beta_V$.

In Antràs (2003) it is assumed that $\theta(j) = 1$ for all headquarter-supplier pairs. The results when this assumption is relaxed are analyzed in Antràs and Helpman (2004). We describe this case in Section 3.

With the assumption that $\theta(j) = 1$, Antràs (2003) shows that there is a unique value of η_i (call it η_c) such that the U.S. firm prefers vertical integration for $\eta_i > \eta_c$ and prefers outsourcing otherwise.

Hypothesis 1. There exists a unique cut-off η_c with the following property. If $\eta_i > \eta_c$ then the firm will vertically integrate with the supplier. If $\eta_i < \eta_c$ then the firm will outsource from the supplier.

We begin by testing Hypothesis 1. The following section describes the data used to test Hypothesis 1 and subsequent hypotheses which are derived from Antràs and Helpman (2004, 2008).

2.1. Data sources

To investigate Hypothesis 1 we use data on intra-firm and total trade from the U.S. Census Bureau. Importers bringing goods into the United States are required by law to report whether or not the transaction is with a related party. This information allows us to identify whether imports are intra-firm (related party) or at arm's-length (non-related party). See Appendix A for details. The trade data are at the 6-digit Harmonized System (HS6) level for the year 2005.[4]

Our key dependent variable is intra-firm imports as a share of total U.S. imports. Let i index industries and let M_i^V be the value of intra-firm U.S. imports in industry i. The V superscript is for vertical integration. Let M_i^O be the value of arm's-length U.S. imports in industry i. The O subscript is for outsourcing. $M_i^V + M_i^O$ is total U.S. imports and $M_i^V/(M_i^V + M_i^O)$ is intra-firm imports as a share of total U.S. imports in industry i.

Antràs (2003) takes a stand on how we measure the headquarter intensity of an industry η_i, arguing that capital investments can be provided by the headquarter, but not labor investments. In subsequent papers, the headquarter intensity has been interpreted as including inputs such as R&D, advertising, and managerial skill (see Antràs and Helpman, 2004, 2008; Yeaple, 2006). At the outset, we do not take a stance on which characteristics best measure inputs provided by the headquarter. Instead, we construct measures of each type of input and let the data speak, indicating which measure produces results that are consistent with the model. We construct three measures that potentially capture the headquarter intensity of an industry. The first is the original measure proposed in Antràs (2003), capital intensity. We also construct measures of skill-intensity and R&D intensity to capture managerial inputs and R&D inputs, both of which are potentially inputs provided by the headquarter. As a test of the model we also construct a factor intensity measure for which it is likely that the input is *not* provided by the headquarter. The measure is material intensity.

Capital, skill, and material intensities are constructed using data on the factor intensity of production in each industry, which are from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2005 *Annual Survey of Manufactures*. We use U.S. factor intensities, assuming that they are correlated with the factor intensity of production in other countries. For each 6-digit NAICS industry we

[4] We are grateful to Andy Bernard for drawing our attention to these data. See Bernard et al. (2005) for an example of how the data have been used.

Table 1
Headquarter intensity and intra-firm trade: testing Antràs (2003), looking across industries.

	Dependent variable: $M_i^V/(M_i^V+M_i^O)$				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
ln R and D/Sales	0.318***	0.310***	0.213***	0.273***	0.288***
	(0.056)	(0.055)	(0.072)	(0.072)	(0.069)
ln Skilled Labor/Worker	0.172***	0.208***	0.236***	0.302***	0.239***
	(0.102)	(0.057)	(0.082)	(0.081)	(0.075)
ln Materials/Worker	0.098	0.091	0.173**	0.155**	0.147*
	(0.065)	(0.065)	(0.074)	(0.076)	(0.076)
ln Capital/Worker	0.167***				
	(0.064)				
ln Buildings/Worker		−0.111	0.005	−0.029	
		(0.064)	(0.071)	(0.076)	
ln Machinery/Worker		0.269***			
		(0.072)			
ln Computers/Worker			0.115		
			(0.078)		
ln Autos/Worker			−0.245***		
			(0.069)		
ln Other Machinery/Worker			0.197**	0.207**	0.203**
			(0.089)	(0.092)	(0.086)
ln Non-Specific Machinery/Worker				−0.072	
				(0.074)	
ln Non-Specific Capital/Worker					−0.056
					(0.074)
Number of observations	298	294	200	200	209
R-Squared	0.20	0.23	0.31	0.27	0.24

Notes: The dependent variable $M_i^V/(M_i^V+M_i^O)$ is U.S. intra-firm imports as a share of total U.S. imports. An observation is a 6-digit NAICS industry. Standardized 'beta' coefficients are reported with their standard errors in brackets. ***, ** and * indicate significance at the 1, 5 and 10 percent levels, respectively. 'Non-Specific Machinery' is Computers + Autos. 'Non-Specific Capital' is Buildings + Computers + Autos. 'Other Machinery' is (total) Capital minus Buildings, Computers, and Autos.

collect information on annual capital expenditures, wages of production workers and non-production workers, and total expenditures on materials. Using this information we construct measures of capital intensity denoted K_i/L_i, skill-intensity S_i/L_i and material intensity N_i/L_i. Capital intensity K_i/L_i is measured as the natural log of capital expenditures divided by all worker wages. Similarly, material intensity N_i/L_i is measured as log material expenditures divided by worker wages. Skill intensity S_i/L_i is the log ratio of non-production worker wages to total worker wages.

Because the *Annual Survey of Manufactures* does not include information on R&D expenditures, the data used to construct R&D intensity are taken from the *Orbis* database, which has information on over 30 million companies worldwide. The database, constructed by Bureau van Dijk Electronic Publishing, is constructed using information from over 40 different information providers. Both private and public companies are listed in the database, with over 99 percent of the companies being private. We measure R&D intensity, which we denote RD_i/Q_i, by the natural log of global R&D expenditures divided by firm sales in each industry.[5]

2.2. Examining hypothesis 1 (Antràs, 2003)

Antràs (2003) examined Hypothesis 1 using BEA data on intra-firm U.S. imports as a share of total U.S. imports. As we noted above, he related this share to capital intensity, his proxy for η_i. We start by examining his relationship with roughly 300 NAICS 6-digit industries. In particular, we consider the following cross-industry regression:

$$\frac{M_i^V}{M_i^V+M_i^O}=\gamma+\gamma_S\frac{S_i}{L_i}+\gamma_R\frac{RD_i}{Q_i}+\gamma_N\frac{N_i}{L_i}+\gamma_K\frac{K_i}{L_i}+\varepsilon_i, \tag{2}$$

where $M_i^V/(M_i^V+M_i^O)$ is the share of U.S. imports in industry i that are intra-firm; S_i/L_i is log of non-production worker wages to total worker wages; RD_i/Q_i is the log of R&D expenditures divided by sales; N_i/L_i is the log of expenditures on materials divided by total worker wages; K_i/L_i is the log of capital expenditures divided by total worker wages.

Estimates of Eq. (2) appear in column 1 of Table 1. The coefficient for capital intensity is positive and statistically significant, a result that confirms the previous findings of Antràs (2003), Yeaple (2006), Bernard et al. (2008), and Nunn and Trefler (2008). The estimated coefficients for skill-intensity and R&D intensity are also positive and statistically significant. The positive

[5] If we do not take the natural log of K_i/L_i, S_i/L_i, and RD_i/Q_i, these measures are left skewed. Taking the natural log results in distributions that are more normally distributed.

coefficient for R&D intensity confirms the finding of Antràs (2003) and Yeaple (2006), while the positive coefficient for skill-intensity differs from Antràs (2003) and Yeaple (2006), who find no statistically significant relationship, but is consistent with the positive coefficient for skill-intensity found by Bernard et al. (2008). The difference in the results may be that Antràs (2003) and Yeaple (2006) use data from a much smaller sample of countries and more aggregate industry data than either us or Bernard et al. (2008).

Because we report standardized 'beta' coefficients, one can easily assess and compare the magnitudes of the coefficients for the capital, skill and R&D intensity measures. According to the estimates of column (1), a one standard deviation increase in capital results in a .167 standard deviation increase in the share of intra-firm imports. This is an economically large effect. The estimated coefficients for skill and R&D intensity, which are even larger, are .172 and .318, respectively.

Recall that in Antràs (2003) the input being produced $q_i(j)$ is a customized variety j of a good in industry i. Because the input is specific to the variety, and therefore to the headquarter-supplier match, it is assumed that investments in h and m are also relationship-specific. That is, they have no value outside of the match. This is an important aspect about the investments in the production of the input which has been taken for granted in previous empirical work such as Yeaple (2006) and Nunn and Trefler (2008). This suggests that when examining capital investments what is important are capital investments that are relationship-specific and therefore have no value outside of the match.

We examine this implication of the model by examining different forms of capital, each with different resale values outside of the relationship. To do this we again rely on data from the 2005 *Annual Survey of Manufactures*. The survey reports total capital divided into the following categories: (i) buildings, (ii) computers, (iii) automobiles, and (iv) other machinery. Among these, buildings, computers, and automobiles have a higher outside value than other forms of machinery. Buildings can be resold and used in the production of other goods. This is in contrast to specialized machinery, which has significantly less use outside of its intended production process. Similarly, computers and automobiles, can be resold and have a use outside of the relationship. Computers include standard desktop computers. Automobiles only include standard vehicles that are driven on roads and do not include specialized vehicles. Both computers and automobiles have much greater outside uses relative to machinery that can only be used directly in the production process.

We construct multiple measures of capital intensity using the capital expenditure data from the 2005 *Annual Survey of Manufactures* and include these in Eq. (2). The results are reported in columns (2)–(5) of Table 1. Each capital intensity measure is constructed as the natural log of the relevant capital expenditures divided by total worker wages.

We begin by dividing capital between buildings and machinery (which is total capital minus buildings). If capital is an input provided by the headquarter as asserted by Antràs (2003), and if machinery is relationship-specific, then a greater machinery intensity increases the need to incentivize the headquarter, and, therefore, there should be more vertical integration and a greater share of intra-firm imports. As reported in column (2), this is indeed what we observe in the data. The coefficient for machinery intensity is positive and statistically significant. Note however, that if buildings are not relationship-specific as we argue, then an increase in the building intensity of an industry does not increase the need to incentivize the headquarter and therefore it should not increase the share of U.S. imports that are intra-firm. This is what we observe in the data. The coefficient for building intensity is not positive and significant like machinery intensity. Instead, it has a negative and statistically insignificant effect on the share of imports that are intra-firm.

We examine this result further in column (3), where we disaggregate capital further, and separately include measures of the factor intensity of buildings, computers, automobiles, and other machinery (total capital minus buildings, computers and autos). Because the value of buildings, computers and automobiles outside of the relationship is likely higher than other forms of capital, we do not expect a positive relationship between these factor intensities and the share of trade that is intra-firm. The estimation results are consistent with this. Only the estimated coefficient for other machinery intensity is positive and statistically significant.

In columns (4) and (5) we report alternative specifications. In column (4) we aggregate computers and automobiles and include this measure, which we label 'non-specific machinery', along with buildings and other machinery in the estimating equation. In column (5) we include an aggregated measure, called 'non-specific capital' (the sum of buildings, computers and automobiles), along with other machinery in the estimating equation. In both specifications, the coefficient for the residual capital intensity measure 'other machinery' is the only coefficient that is positive and statistically significant.

Overall, the results of columns (2)–(5) of Table 1 show that only for the relationship-specific capital intensity measure do we find the predicted positive relationship with the share of imports that are intra-firm.

The validity of estimating Eq. (2) rests on the assumption that we can aggregate across exporting countries. Yet as Schott (2004) notes, this may be misleading because an HS6 good produced in a poor country may be very different from an HS6 good produced in a rich country. To address this, we follow Nunn and Trefler (2008) and estimate a regression that examines variation across industries and countries:

$$\frac{M_{ic}^V}{M_{ic}^V + M_{ic}^O} = \gamma_c + \gamma_S \frac{S_i}{L_i} + \gamma_R \frac{RD_i}{Q_i} + \gamma_N \frac{N_i}{L_i} + \gamma_K \frac{K_i}{L_i} + \varepsilon_{ic}, \tag{3}$$

where i now subscripts HS6 products rather than 6-digit NAICS industries, and c denotes countries. $M_{ic}^V/(M_{ic}^V + M_{ic}^O)$ is the share of U.S. imports from country c in industry i that are intra-firm. As before S_i/L_i is the log of non-production worker wages to total worker wages; RD_i/Q_i is the log of R&D expenditures divided by sales; N_i/L_i is the log of expenditures on

Table 2
Headquarter intensity and intra-firm trade: testing Antràs (2003), looking across industries and countries.

	Dependent variable: $M_{ic}^V/(M_{ic}^V + M_{ic}^O)$				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Determinants of the share of U.S. imports that are intra-firm					
ln R and D/Sales	0.074***	0.062***	0.051***	0.064***	0.065***
	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.015)
ln Skilled Labor/Worker	0.070***	0.090***	0.121***	0.130***	0.122***
	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.028)	(0.026)	(0.024)
ln Materials/Worker	0.029*	0.023	0.019	0.018	0.023
	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.016)
ln Capital/Worker	0.043**				
	(0.017)				
ln Buildings/Worker		−0.046***	−0.034*	−0.039*	
		(0.010)	(0.034)	(0.020)	
ln Machinery/Worker		0.078***			
		(0.028)			
ln Computers/Worker			0.000		
			(0.020)		
ln Autos/Worker			−0.052***		
			(0.014)		
ln Other Machinery/Worker			0.095***	0.087***	0.082***
			(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)
ln Non-Specific Machinery/Worker				−0.031	
				(0.021)	
ln Non-Specific Capital/Worker					−0.053**
					(0.018)
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of observations	119,621	118,973	92,611	92,611	94,749
Number of clusters	298	294	200	200	209
R-Squared	0.12	0.12	0.13	0.13	0.13

Notes: The dependent variable $M_{ic}^V/(M_{ic}^V + M_{ic}^O)$ is U.S. intra-firm imports as a share of total U.S. imports. An observation is a HS6-country pair. All equations include country fixed effects. Standardized 'beta' coefficients are reported with their standard errors, clustered at the 6-digit NAICS industry level, in brackets. ***, ** and * indicate significance at the 1, 5 and 10 percent levels, respectively. 'Non-Specific Machinery' is Computers + Autos. 'Non-Specific Capital' is Buildings + Computers + Autos. 'Other Machinery' is (total) Capital minus Buildings, Computers, and Autos.

materials divided by total worker wages; K_i/L_i is the log of capital expenditures divided by total worker wages. We control for exporter heterogeneity by allowing for country fixed effects γ_c.

Estimates appear in Table 2. Because our variables of interest K_i/L_i, RD_i/Q_i and S_i/L_i only vary at the 6-digit NAICS industry level, while the unit of observation is a country and HS6 good, we report standard errors clustered at the 6-digit NAICS level. The estimates, consistent with the cross-industry estimates of Table 1, show that the capital, R&D, and skill intensity of an industry are positively correlated with the share of intra-firm trade. The estimates in columns (2)–(5) further show that this positive relationship is driven solely by the part of capital which is more relationship-specific. Overall, these results combined with the cross-industry results of Table 1 provide support for Hypothesis 1.

2.3. *Explicitly allowing for partially contractible investments (Antràs and Helpman, 2008)*

In Antràs and Helpman (2008), the assumptions of complete relationship-specificity and non-contractibility of investments are relaxed. Instead, it is assumed that a fraction μ_h and μ_m of the inputs provided by the headquarter and supplier are either not relationship-specific or are contractible. (Only one of these two conditions need to be met to alleviate underinvestment.) In other words, for the fraction $1-\mu_h$ and $1-\mu_m$ of h and m inputs (respectively), the investments are relationship-specific and ex post enforceable contracts cannot be written.

In Eq. (10) of Antràs and Helpman (2004), the headquarter's profit-maximizing bargaining share as a function of η is given. Slight manipulation of this expression yields:

$$\beta_h^* = \frac{\eta_h(1-\alpha\eta_m) - \sqrt{\eta_h\eta_m(1-\alpha\eta_h)(1-\alpha\eta_m)}}{\eta_h - \eta_m}. \tag{4}$$

This can be compared to the optimal bargaining share from Antràs and Helpman (2008), where investments are partially contractible. In Antràs and Helpman (2008), the optimal bargaining share is given by:

$$\beta_h^* = \frac{\omega_h(1-\alpha\omega_m) - \sqrt{\omega_h\omega_m(1-\alpha\omega_h)(1-\alpha\omega_m)}}{\omega_h - \omega_m}, \tag{5}$$

where $\omega_h \equiv (1-\mu_h)\eta$ and $\omega_m \equiv (1-\mu_m)(1-\eta)$.

Table 3
Partially contractible capital and intra-firm trade: testing Antràs and Helpman (2008).

	Dep var: share of intra-firm trade, $M^V/(M^V+M^O)$			
	Industry-Country Regressions		Industry Regressions	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
ln Capital/Worker, K_i/L_i	0.032*	0.035**	0.188***	0.170***
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.065)	(0.065)
Buildings/Total Capital, $x_i^{\mu 1}$	−0.042***		−0.027	
	(0.011)		(0.056)	
(Buildings + Autos + Computers)/Total Capital, $x_i^{\mu 2}$		−0.048***		−0.121**
		(0.012)		(0.053)
All Control Variables	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of observations	119,536	118,973	297	294
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes	n/a	n/a
Number of clusters	297	297	n/a	n/a
R-Squared	0.12	0.12	0.21	0.23

Notes: The dependent variable $M_{ic}^V/(M_{ic}^V+M_{ic}^O)$ is U.S. intra-firm imports as a share of total U.S. imports. An observation is an HS6-country pair. Standardized 'beta' coefficients are reported with their standard errors in brackets. In columns 1 and 2, standard errors are clustered at the 6-digit NAICS industry level. ***, ** and * indicate significance at the 1, 5 and 10 percent levels, respectively. The 'Industry-Country Regressions' of columns 1 and 2 include country fixed effects. 'All Control Variables' includes H_i/L_i, M_i/L_i, and RD_i/Q_i.

Comparing Eqs. (4) and (5), it is clear that the expression for the headquarter's optimal bargaining share has the same functional form in the two papers except that when the fraction μ_h of headquarter investments are contractible then η is replaced with $(1-\mu_h)\eta$. Similarly, $1-\eta$ is also replaced with $(1-\mu_m)(1-\eta)$.

The intuition for this is straightforward. In Antràs (2003), η increases vertical integration because it increases the importance of the headquarter's underinvestment and the need to incentivize the headquarter. When part of the headquarter's investments are contractible, then η no longer measures the underinvestment of the headquarter. This is given by the fraction of investments that are non contractible $(1-\mu_h)$ multiplied by η.

Assume for the moment that, as in Antràs (2003), the fixed costs of vertical integration and the fixed costs of outsourcing are equal. The only effect that the choice of organizational form has is on β, the share of the ex post surplus that accrues to the headquarter. From Antràs and Helpman (2008) we then have the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2. There exists a unique cut-off η_{hc} with the following property. If $\eta_i > \eta_{hc}$ then the firm will vertically integrate with the supplier. If $\eta_i < \eta_{hc}$ then the firm will outsource from the supplier. In addition, the cut-off η_{hc} is higher the higher is μ_h and the lower is μ_m.

From Hypothesis 2 it follows that as before the share of trade that is intra-firm should be increasing in η. As well, the share of intra-firm trade should be decreasing in the share of headquarter-investments that are not contractible μ_h. We test this prediction of Antràs and Helpman (2008) by focusing on the contractibility of headquarter investments, μ_h. Using our disaggregated capital expenditure data from the 2005 *ASM*, we construct two industry-specific measures of μ_h. The first measure of μ_i, which we denote $x_i^{\mu 1}$, is the fraction of capital expenditures on buildings:

$$x_i^{\mu 1} = \frac{\text{Buildings}_i}{\text{Total Capital}_i}.$$

The second measure is the fraction of expenditures on buildings, automobiles, and computers:

$$x_i^{\mu 2} = \frac{\text{Buildings}_i + \text{Autos}_i + \text{Computers}_i}{\text{Total Capital}_i}.$$

The measure of contractibility of capital investments is different from other measures of contractibility that exist in the literature. The measure of contractibility in Nunn (2007) is the share of intermediate inputs used in production that can be bought and sold in thick markets. Bernard et al. (2008) use the share of U.S. imports controlled by wholesale and retail firms, measured at the HS10 level. The measures constructed here are not measures that attempt to quantify how 'contractible' goods in an industry are. Therefore it is conceptually very different from the measure from Bernard et al. (2008). Instead the measures here quantify the share of capital investments typically made in an industry that have value outside of the relationship i.e., that are not relationship-specific. It is more similar to the measure from Nunn (2007), which quantifies the relationship-specificity of the intermediate inputs used in the production process. Similar to this measure, $x_i^{\mu 1}$ and $x_i^{\mu 2}$ quantify the relationship-specificity of capital used in the production process.

Estimates of our baseline equations (2) and (3), with the x_i^{μ} measures included, are reported in Table 3. Columns (1) and (2) report estimates of the country-industry level regression equation (3) and columns (3) and (4) report the estimates of industry level equation (2).

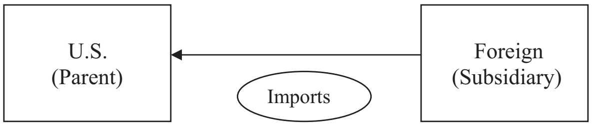

Fig. 1. U.S. imports: The ownership structure consistent with Antràs (2003) and Antràs and Helpman (2004, 2008).

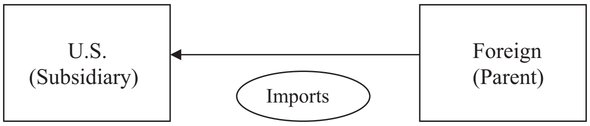

Fig. 2. U.S. imports: The ownership structure not consistent with Antràs (2003) and Antràs and Helpman (2004, 2008).

Overall, the estimation results are consistent with the predictions of Antràs and Helpman (2008). In all specifications, the estimated coefficients for capital intensity are positive and highly significant, while the coefficients for the x_i^{μ} variables are negative in all four specifications and significant in three of the four.

2.4. Robustness check: correctly identifying the parent and the subsidiary

The results of Antràs (2003) and Antràs and Helpman (2004, 2008) are based on a specific environment. A key assumption is that the intermediate input is produced in the foreign subsidiary's country and is then shipped to the headquarter country. We have been assuming that the U.S. is the headquarter and the foreign country is the subsidiary, and that the observed intra-firm imports are imports being shipped from a foreign subsidiary to a U.S. headquarter. In reality, these imports could be imports being shipped from a foreign parent to a U.S. subsidiary. If this is the case, then this environment is very different from that modeled in Antràs (2003) and Antràs and Helpman (2004, 2008).

If, for example, the good is produced by a foreign headquarter and shipped to a U.S. subsidiary, then the crucial assumption that the headquarter can only provide headquarter inputs when producing the input is no longer realistic. In Antràs (2003) it is assumed that the headquarter cannot provide labor inputs because it is not familiar with foreign labor markets and because it is difficult to have a managerial presence in the foreign country (Antràs, 2003, p. 1379). But if the input is being produced in the headquarter's country then these arguments no longer apply. There is no reason that the headquarter cannot provide *all* of the inputs required to produce the intermediate input. It is also no longer clear that capital is the input provided by the headquarter. Therefore, there is no longer a reason to expect capital intensity to be correlated with vertical integration.

Figs. 1 and 2 report the two possible scenarios, when examining U.S. imports. Fig. 1 shows the case where goods are being imported from a foreign subsidiary to a U.S. headquarter. This is the environment being modeled in Antràs (2003) and Antràs and Helpman (2004, 2008). Fig. 2 shows the other case where a good is being shipped from a foreign parent to a U.S. subsidiary. This case, as we have argued, does not fit the models being examined here.

To distinguish empirically between the two cases shown in Figs. 1 and 2, we use data from Bureau van Djik's *Orbis* Database, which provides information on the name and country of the headquarters and subsidiaries of global multinationals, as well as the industry that the firms are classified under. Using this information we identify all subsidiary headquarter pairs in which either the subsidiary or the headquarter are from the U.S. (pairs in which both the subsidiary and the headquarter are from the U.S. are excluded). We then calculate for each foreign country (i) the number of pairs for which the headquarter is from the U.S., (ii) the number of pairs for which the subsidiary is from the U.S., and (iii) the fraction of pairs for which the U.S. is the headquarter. This information is reported in Table 4 for all countries for which the share of pairs for which the U.S. is the parent below 75 percent. As shown, only 18 countries fall into this category. This indicates that for the vast majority of countries, the U.S. is generally the headquarter. The countries for which this is not the case tend to be developed countries, such as Italy, Sweden, Switzerland and Japan.

We use the information from Table 4 to identify countries for which intra-firm imports are more likely to be from a foreign subsidiary to a U.S. parent (the case from Fig. 2) and construct a restricted sample of countries for which the share of U.S. headquarters is above 50 percent. This amounts to removing Iceland, Italy, Finland, Liechtenstein, and Switzerland from the sample.

Table 5 reproduces the estimates of Table 1 using the more restricted sample of countries. As shown, the results are qualitatively identical.[6]

An alternative scenario that fits the Antràs (2003) and Antràs and Helpman (2004, 2008) models cleanly is the case of exports from a U.S. subsidiary to a foreign parent. Here the interpretation is that an intermediate input is produced by a U.S. subsidiary and then it is *exported* to a foreign parent. Fig. 3 shows this case.

[6] An alternative strategy is to calculate the fraction of partnerships for which the U.S. is the headquarter for all country and industry pairs. The industry-country measures can then be used to omit observations from the sample. Results are similar if this strategy is pursued.

Table 4
Average nationality of the parent (foreign vs. U.S.) by country.

Country	Number of relationships with: A U.S. parent	A foreign parent	Share of relationships with a U.S. parent
Iceland	4	7	0.36
Italy	485	800	0.38
Finland	89	142	0.39
Liechtenstein	5	6	0.45
Switzerland	503	559	0.47
Sweden	251	230	0.52
Taiwan	141	112	0.56
Belgium	362	256	0.59
Bermuda	315	216	0.59
Norway	124	85	0.59
Denmark	231	161	0.60
Korea	202	131	0.61
Japan	491	309	0.61
Spain	520	319	0.62
Israel	112	63	0.64
Austria	137	61	0.69
France	1176	521	0.69
Germany	1571	556	0.74

Notes: The table reports the total number of parent–subsidiary pairs divided into cases in which the parent/headquarter is a U.S. firm and in which the parent/headquarter is a foreign firm. The final column reports the fraction of relationships in which the parent is a U.S. firm. These figures are reported separately for each country. The table only reports the 18 countries with the lowest average U.S. parent share. Data are from the *Orbis Database*.

Table 5
Imports into the U.S. among a restricted sample of countries: testing Antràs (2003) and Antràs and Helpman (2008).

Dep var: $M_{ic}^V/(M_{ic}^V+M_{ic}^O)$	Restricted sample: $HQ_c^{US} > HQ_c^F$				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
ln R and D/Sales	0.074***	0.062***	0.051***	0.064***	0.065***
	(0.015)	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.016)
ln Skilled Labor/Worker	0.068***	0.088***	0.118***	0.127***	0.120***
	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.045)	(0.026)	(0.024)
ln Materials/Worker	0.031*	0.025	0.020	0.020	0.025
	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
ln Capital/Worker	0.041**				
	(0.017)				
ln Buildings/Worker		−0.047***	−0.036*	−0.040*	
		(0.017)	(0.020)	(0.020)	
ln Machinery/Worker		0.077***			
		(0.016)			
ln Computers/Worker			0.003		
			(0.025)		
ln Autos/Worker			−0.052***		
			(0.014)		
ln Other Machinery/Worker			0.094***	0.085***	0.081***
			(0.019)	(0.019)	0.018
ln Non-Specific Machinery/Worker				−0.029	
				(0.021)	
ln Non-Specific Capital/Worker					−0.054***
					(0.019)
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of observations	111,665	111,065	86,622	86,622	88,579
Number of clusters	298	294	200	200	209
R-Squared	0.12	0.12	0.13	0.13	0.13

Notes: The dependent variable $M_{ic}^V/(M_{ic}^V+M_{ic}^O)$ is U.S. intra-firm imports as a share of total U.S. imports. An observation is a HS6-country pair. All equations include country fixed effects. Standardized 'beta' coefficients are reported, with standard errors clustered at the 6-digit NAICS industry level in brackets. ***, ** and * indicate significance at the 1, 5 and 10 percent levels, respectively. 'Non-Specific Machinery' is Computers + Autos. 'Non-Specific Capital' is Buildings + Computers + Autos. 'Other Machinery' is (total) Capital minus Buildings, Computers, and Autos.

Fig. 3. U.S. exports: The ownership structure consistent with Antràs (2003) and Antràs and Helpman (2004, 2008).

Fig. 4. U.S. exports: The ownership structure inconsistent with Antràs (2003) and Antràs and Helpman (2004, 2008).

Table 6
Exports into the U.S. among a restricted sample of countries: testing Antràs (2003) and Antràs and Helpman (2008).

Dep var: $X^V_{ic}/(X^V_{ic}+X^O_{ic})$	Restricted sample: $HQ^F_c/(HQ^F_c+HQ^{US}_c) > .65$				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
ln R and D/Sales	0.075***	0.064***	0.060***	0.068***	0.069***
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
ln Skilled Labor/Worker	0.080**	0.100***	0.149***	0.154***	0.144***
	(0.036)	(0.037)	(0.034)	(0.032)	(0.029)
ln Materials/Worker	0.021	0.015	0.004	0.003	0.006
	(0.021)	(0.020)	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.022)
ln Capital/Worker	0.074***				
	(0.022)				
ln Buildings/Worker		−0.043**	−0.035	−0.039	
		(0.018)	(0.023)	(0.024)	
ln Machinery/Worker		0.109***			
		(0.019)			
ln Computers/Worker			−0.006		
			(0.025)		
ln Autos/Worker			−0.041**		
			(0.017)		
ln Other Machinery/Worker			0.118***	0.113***	0.109***
			(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.022)
ln Non-Specific Machinery/Worker				−0.029	
				(0.008)	
ln Non-Specific Capital/Worker					−0.048**
					(0.020)
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of observations	29,965	29,784	22,610	22,610	23,232
Number of clusters	297	293	200	200	206
R-Squared	0.12	0.12	0.13	0.13	0.13

Notes: The dependent variable $X^V_{ic}/(X^V_{ic}+X^O_{ic})$ is U.S. intra-firm exports as a share of total exports from the U.S. An observation is an HS6-country pair. All equations include country fixed effects. Standardized 'beta' coefficients are reported, with standard errors, clustered at the 6-digit NAICS industry level, in brackets. ***, ** and * indicate significance at the 1, 5 and 10 percent levels, respectively. 'Non-Specific Machinery' is Computers + Autos. 'Non-Specific Capital' is Buildings + Computers + Autos. 'Other Machinery' is (total) Capital minus Buildings, Computers, and Autos.

The last possible scenario is where a U.S. headquarter produces the intermediate input and exports it to a foreign subsidiary. This is shown in Fig. 4. The same argument and discussion as for Fig. 2 also applies to Fig. 4. Therefore, there is no reason to expect the predictions of the Antràs (2003) and Antràs and Helpman (2004, 2008) models to be relevant for this case.

We try and distinguish empirically the case shown in Fig. 3 from the case in Fig. 4 by examining the determinants of intra-firm exports from the U.S. to countries for which the headquarter is typically the foreign country and the U.S. is the subsidiary. We identify these countries again using the *Orbis* data. We choose to include in the sample the 15 countries with the lowest share of U.S. headquarters. This is equivalent to choosing a cut-off of 65 percent.[7]

These results are reported in Table 6. Overall, the results are consistent with the results obtained when U.S. imports are examined (reported in Tables 2 and 5). The share of intra-firm exports from the U.S. are higher in headquarter-intensive industries, as measured by capital intensity. This is shown in column (1). Columns (2)–(5) show that this effect is driven by the relationship-specific components of capital, and not by buildings, computers or autos.[8]

[7] The coefficient estimates are similar, but with larger standard errors, if one chooses a cut-off of 50 percent so that only 5 countries are included in the sample.

[8] Again, one can pursue the alternative strategy of constructing country-industry specific measures of the share of relationships for which the parent is the foreign country. Examining exports and restricting observations using this measure also yields results that support Hypothesis 1.

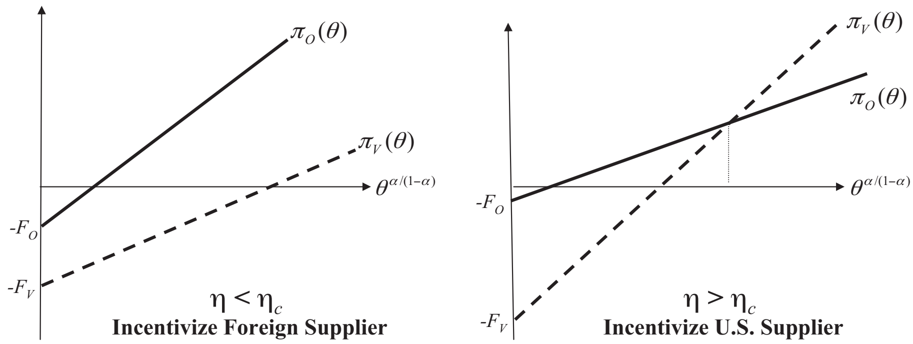

Fig. 5. The outsourcing decision with firm-specific productivity differences.

3. Productivity heterogeneity (Antràs and Helpman, 2004)

Antràs and Helpman (2004) relax the assumption of the same productivity across firms. That is, $\theta(j)$ in Eq. (1) is allowed to vary across firm-supplier relationships.

Let $\overline{\pi}_k$ be variable profits for a firm with $\theta = 1$ that uses organizational form $k = V, O$. Then, as is well known, profits for a firm with productivity θ that adopts organizational form k are linear in $\theta^{\alpha/(1-\alpha)}$:

$$\pi_k(\theta) = \theta^{\alpha/(1-\alpha)}\overline{\pi}_k - F_k, \tag{6}$$

where F_k is the fixed costs of offshoring using organizational form k. Antràs (2003) assumes that all firms have the same productivity ($\theta = 1$) and the same fixed costs ($F_V = F_O$). Under these assumptions the Antràs effect states that $\overline{\pi}_V > \overline{\pi}_O$ if and only if $\eta > \eta_c$ i.e., the U.S. firm prefers vertical integration to outsourcing when the firm's share of inputs is large. Heterogeneity of productivity by itself does not alter this conclusion – it simply magnifies the advantages (or disadvantages) of vertical integration.[9] However, when the fixed costs of outsourcing vary across organizational forms then productivity heterogeneity matters. How heterogeneity matters depends on whether $F_V - F_O$ is positive or negative. Antràs and Helpman assume that $F_V > F_O$.[10]

Fig. 5 illustrates what happens when heterogeneity is introduced. The figure plots profits under outsourcing $\pi_O(\theta)$ and vertical integration $\pi_V(\theta)$. From Antràs (2003, lemma 3), we know that $\overline{\pi}_V/\overline{\pi}_O$ is increasing in η and equals 1 for $\eta = \eta_c$. This together with Eq. (6) implies that $\pi_V(\theta)$ is steeper than $\pi_O(\theta)$ for $\eta > \eta_c$ and flatter for $\eta < \eta_c$. From the left-hand panel of Fig. 5 where $\eta < \eta_c$ and $F_V > F_O$, it must be that outsourcing is always preferred to vertical integration. The Antràs effect and the lower fixed costs of outsourcing both work in favor of outsourcing.

When $\eta > \eta_c$, as in the right-hand panel of Fig. 5, $\pi_V(\theta)$ is steeper than $\pi_O(\theta)$. It follows that the two curves must cross. Firms with productivity to the right of the crossing point will vertically integrate. Firms to the left will outsource. The tension here is that fixed costs push for outsourcing while the Antràs effect pushes for vertical integration. Since the Antràs effect is greatest for the most productive firms, the Antràs effect dominates for productive firms.

All of this leads to an interesting empirical prediction about the share of U.S. imports that are intra-firm, $M^V_{ic}/(M^V_{ic} + M^O_{ic})$. The share should depend on an interaction of η_i with $\theta(j)$. In industries for which $\eta_i < \eta_c$, we have that $M^V_{ic} = 0$ so that an increase in the productivity of a match $\theta(j)$ has no effect on its organizational form and $M^V_{ic}/(M^V_{ic} + M^O_{ic}) = 0$. In industries with $\eta_i > \eta_c$, an increase in $\theta(j)$ increases the likelihood that vertical integration is chosen and therefore it will increase $M^V_{ic}/(M^V_{ic} + M^O_{ic})$.

If one assumes, as Antràs and Helpman (2004) do, that firm productivity follows a Pareto distribution, then these predictions can be stated in terms of differences in the dispersion of firm productivity within industries, which we denote by x^θ_i. When $\eta_i > \eta_c$, then in industries with a greater dispersion of firm productivities (i.e., a higher x^θ_i), we should see a larger share of firms that vertically integrate, i.e. a higher $M^V_{ic}/(M^V_{ic} + M^O_{ic})$. On the other hand, when $\eta < \eta_c$, an increase in x^θ_i has no effect on $M^V_{ic}/(M^V_{ic} + M^O_{ic})$, since this is independent of productivity and equal to zero. Therefore, we have the following hypothesis from the Antràs-Helpman (2004) model.

[9] That is, if $F_V = F_O$ then $\pi_V(\theta) > \pi_O(\theta) \Leftrightarrow \overline{\pi}_V > \overline{\pi}_O$ and it remains true that the firm prefers vertical integration if and only if $\eta > \eta_c$.

[10] They argue that vertical integration creates a need to supervise the production of intermediate inputs, thus creating managerial overload.

Hypothesis 3. Assume $F_V > F_O$. Let x_i^θ be the dispersion of θ across firms within industry i. Then,

(a) If $\eta < \eta_c$ then dispersion does not affect the intra-firm share of imports: $\frac{\partial M_{ic}^V/(M_{ic}^V+M_{ic}^O)}{\partial x_i^\theta} = 0$.

(b) If $\eta > \eta_c$ then dispersion increases the intra-firm share of imports: $\frac{\partial M_{ic}^V/(M_{ic}^V+M_{ic}^O)}{\partial x_i^\theta} > 0$.

3.1. Examining Hypothesis 3 (Antràs and Helpman, 2004)

Testing Hypothesis 3 requires a measure of productivity dispersion x_i^θ. The strategy we pursue here follows the basic logic of Helpman et al. (2004) and Yeaple (2006) who use the standard deviation of firm sales within an industry as a measure of dispersion.

In the theory $\theta(j)$ is pair specific. Therefore, productivity varies across matches, with part of the match being a U.S. firm and part of the match being a foreign firm. As well, $\theta(j)$ maps directly onto firm sales $Q_{f,i,c}$. Although we observe sales at the firm level, we do not observe the trade data at the firm level. This is only observed at the industry-country level. Therefore, we need to think carefully about how we will match our constructed measure of productivity to the trade data.

In the trade data we can identify the location of the headquarter and supplier. We know the country the goods are being shipped from and the country they are being shipped to. We also have a sense of which is most likely the headquarter and which is most likely the subsidiary. (Assume for the moment that we restrict our sample to cases where the headquarter is in the U.S.) Next, we need to think about whether we can identify the industry of the headquarter and the subsidiary. If we can do this, then we can map headquarter and/or subsidiary productivities to the trade data.

The industry of the subsidiary, who produces the input, is easy to identify since the industry of the input, and therefore its producer, is recorded in U.S. trade statistics. However, the industry of the headquarter cannot be determined directly from the data unless one assumes that the industry of the headquarter is the same as the industry of the supplier. Although previous studies have made this assumption, it may be inaccurate in many cases.[11] Take for example a Korean tire manufacturer that ships tires to a car manufacturer in the United States. The tires being shipped (and the tire manufacturer) are classified in the trade data under the NAICS 6-digit category “Tire manufacturing”. For this pair, $\theta(j)$ can arise from either (i) the productivity of the Korean tire manufacturer or (ii) the productivity of the U.S. car manufacturer. The productivity dispersion measures that would be relevant would be either (i) the productivity dispersion of Korean tire manufacturers or (ii) the productivity dispersion of the U.S. car manufacturer. However, in this case, using the productivity dispersion of U.S. tire manufacturers would be incorrect.[12]

Note that between measures (i) and (ii), only (i) is easily identifiable. From the trade data we do not know the industry of the importing headquarter, only the industry of the exporting subsidiary. Therefore, for our analysis we use measure (i), which is the productivity dispersion in the industry and country of the exporting subsidiary. This implicitly only considers the influence on $\theta(j)$ exerted by the supplier side of the match. This is clearly incomplete. However, it is driven solely by data limitations.[13]

Our measure of dispersion is the standard deviation of the log of plant sales $\ln Q_{f,i,c}$ within an industry i and a country c:

$$x_{ic}^\theta \equiv \sqrt{\mathbf{V}(\ln Q_{f,i,c})}, \tag{7}$$

where $\mathbf{V}$ is the variance operator.[14]

We use data on plant sales from the *Orbis* database, which reports data on firm sales annually from 1998 to 2006. Our sample includes all 760,000 plants in the database with sales in 2005. The average number of plants in a country-industry pair is 90.

To illustrate our measure, consider again the example of Korea tire manufacturers. One observation of x_{ic}^θ will be the log dispersion of firm sales across tire manufacturers in Korea. The model of Antràs and Helpman (2004) predicts that when dispersion (and average productivity) is high among tire manufacturers in Korea, then the productivity of the match $\theta(j)$ is more likely to be high, and therefore we are more likely to observe a vertically integrated relationship (if tire manufacturing is a headquarter-intensive (high η) industry).

[11] See for example Yeaple (2006). In effect, the assumption is that $\theta(j)$ is determined solely by the U.S. headquarter and that the headquarter's industry is the same as the subsidiaries (which is reflected in the trade data). If these assumptions are satisfied, then an acceptable measure of productivity dispersion is the productivity dispersion of U.S. firms within an industry.

[12] In Yeaple's (2006) empirical analysis the dispersion measures are constructed for 51 industries. We have argued that an important assumption of the measure is that the industry of the headquarter is the same as the industry of the subsidiary. Looking within more aggregated industries it is much more likely that this assumption is satisfied. Therefore, when working with more aggregate data U.S. productivity dispersion may be a perfectly fine measure to use. However, when moving to the NAICS 6-digit level, it becomes much less likely that the industry of the supplier is the same as the industry of the headquarter.

[13] In future work, it would be possible to use U.S. Input–Output tables to estimate probabilistically the industry of the headquarter.

[14] See Helpman et al. (2004, p. 307) for an explanation of how the standard deviation of the log of firm sales recovers the Pareto dispersion parameter.

Table 7
Productivity dispersion, headquarter intensity and intra-firm trade: testing Antràs and Helpman (2004).

	Dependent variable: $M^V_{ic}/(M^V_{ic}+M^O_{ic})$				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Capital	Machinery	Other Machinery	Skill	R &D
Dispersion: x^θ_{ic}	0.037***	0.042***	0.045***	−0.018	0.014
	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.012)
Headquarter interaction: $x^\theta_{ic}\times x^\eta_i$	0.014**	0.015***	0.019***	−0.034**	−0.0001
	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.016)	(0.002)
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
All Control Variables	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of observations	42,101	41,895	33,433	42,101	42,101
Number of clusters	267	264	189	267	267
R-Squared	0.12	0.13	0.13	0.12	0.12

Notes: The dependent variable $M^V_{ic}/(M^V_{ic}+M^O_{ic})$ is U.S. intra-firm imports as a share of total U.S. imports. An observation is an HS6-country pair. All equations include country fixed effects. Regular coefficients are reported with standard errors, clustered at the 6-digit NAICS industry level, in brackets. ***, ** and * indicate significance at the 1, 5 and 10 percent levels, respectively. 'Machinery' is (total) Capital minus Buildings. 'Other Machinery' is (total) Capital minus Buildings, Computers, and Autos. 'All Control Variables' includes M_i/L_i and the headquarter intensity measures.

We test Hypothesis 3 by examining how the relationship between productivity dispersion x^θ_{ic} and intra-firm imports varies with headquarter intensity. We begin by first estimating Eq. (3), but now interacting our measure of headquarter intensity with our measure of productivity dispersion x^θ_{ic}. The estimating equation is:

$$\frac{M^V_{ic}}{M^V_{ic}+M^O_{ic}}=\gamma_c+\gamma_S\frac{S_i}{L_i}+\gamma_R\frac{RD_i}{Q_i}+\gamma_N\frac{N_i}{L_i}+\gamma_K\frac{K_i}{L_i}+\delta_\theta x^\theta_{ic}+\delta_{\theta\eta}x^\theta_{ic}\times x^\eta_i+\varepsilon_{ic}, \tag{8}$$

where x^η_i denotes a measure of headquarter intensity, either K_i/L_i, H_i/L_i or RD_i/Q_i.

The estimation results are reported in Table 7. Each column reports the results using a different measure of headquarter intensity. As shown, when any of our measures of capital are used as the measure of headquarter intensity, the results are consistent with Hypothesis 3. The estimated relationship between productivity dispersion and the share of trade that is intra-firm is higher in higher capital intensity. As well, the estimated effect becomes larger as the measure of capital becomes more restricted and excludes capital that is not customized and relationship-specific.

The final two columns of the table show that when either skill-intensity or R&D intensity are used as the measure of headquarter intensity, the estimates do not provide support for Hypothesis 3. Therefore, the model is supported only if we assume that capital is the input provided by the headquarter.

Strictly speaking, from Hypothesis 3, we do not expect the second derivative to be linear as imposed in Eq. (8). It will be 0 when η is small and positive when η is large, although we do not know where the cut-off level η_c will be. Because of this, we pursue an alternative estimation strategy. We rank our 298 6-digit NAICS industries by headquarters intensity, measured by either R&D intensity, skill intensity, or capital intensity. Based on this ranking, we divide the 298 industries into 10 deciles of about 30 industries each. Let $p=1,\ldots,10$ index deciles, with $p=1$ being the least headquarter-intensive decile and $p=10$ the most. Finally, let $I^\eta_{ip}=1$ if industry i is in decile p and $I^\eta_{ip}=0$ otherwise.

We consider a regression that allows the relationship between dispersion and intra-firm imports to differ by decile:

$$\frac{M^V_{ic}}{M^V_{ic}+M^O_{ic}}=\gamma_c+\gamma_K\frac{K_i}{L_i}+\gamma_H\frac{H_i}{L_i}+\gamma_R\frac{RD_i}{Q_i}+\gamma_M\frac{M_i}{L_i}+\sum_{p=1}^{10}\gamma_{\eta p}I^\eta_{ip}+\sum_{p=1}^{10}\gamma_{\theta\eta p}(x^\theta_{ic}\cdot I^\eta_{ip})+\varepsilon_{ic}. \tag{9}$$

The primary coefficients of interest are the $\gamma_{\theta\eta p}$'s. Hypothesis 3 states that for low η and hence low p the impact of dispersion should be zero, i.e. $\gamma_{\theta\eta p}=0$ for low p. Hypothesis 3 also states that for high η, and hence high p, the impact of dispersion should be positive, i.e. $\gamma_{\theta\eta p}>0$ for high p. As we do not know which decile p contains the cut-off η_c we cannot be more precise about what 'low' and 'high' p means. We let the data answer this.

Table 8 reports the estimates of Eq. (9). The table reports three columns each using a different measure of capital as a measure of headquarter intensity. In column 1, we measure headquarter intensity by capital intensity, and in columns 2 and 3, we use our two measures of capital that exclude the less relationship-specific components of total capital. Consistent with Hypothesis 3 we observe a one time significant jump in the magnitude of the estimated coefficient when moving from the first to tenth deciles. The jump occurs at about the 6th decile (in columns 1 and 2) or 8th decile (in column 3). Consider the estimates from columns 1 and 2. Here, we find that $0\approx\hat{\gamma}_{\theta\eta1}\approx\cdots\approx\hat{\gamma}_{\theta\eta6}<\hat{\gamma}_{\theta\eta7}\approx\cdots\approx\hat{\gamma}_{\theta\eta10}$. *F*-tests cannot reject the null hypothesis of the equality of any pair of coefficients among $\hat{\gamma}_{\theta\eta1}$ to $\hat{\gamma}_{\theta\eta6}$. However, *F*-tests generally do reject the null hypothesis of equality between any of $\hat{\gamma}_{\theta\eta1}$ to $\hat{\gamma}_{\theta\eta6}$ coefficients and either $\hat{\gamma}_{\theta\eta7}$, $\hat{\gamma}_{\theta\eta8}$, $\hat{\gamma}_{\theta\eta9}$ or $\hat{\gamma}_{\theta\eta10}$. For column 3, the finding is analogous but with the cut-off being after decile 8.

One concern with the results of Table 8 is the small number of observations within each decile. We have estimated Eq. (9) using quintiles rather than deciles and find qualitatively identical results. Specifically, we find zero estimated coefficients for

Table 8
Deciles of productivity dispersion, headquarter intensity and intra-firm trade: testing Antràs and Helpman (2004).

	Dependent variable: $M_{ic}^V/(M_{ic}^V+M_{ic}^O)$		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Capital	Machinery	Other Machinery
Dispersion x_{ic}^{θ} interacted with:			
I_{i1}^{η}	0.009	0.005	0.005
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.022)
I_{i2}^{η}	0.017	−0.001	−0.006
	(0.025)	(0.010)	(0.009)
I_{i3}^{η}	0.009	−0.004	−0.015
	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.015)
I_{i4}^{η}	−0.019*	−0.013	−0.005
	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.017)
I_{i5}^{η}	−0.003	0.001	−0.007
	(0.011)	(0.008)	(0.010)
I_{i6}^{η}	0.005	−0.012	−0.011
	(0.014)	(0.017)	(0.014)
I_{i7}^{η}	0.024**	0.019*	0.010
	(0.010)	(0.011)	(0.014)
I_{i8}^{η}	0.020	0.015	0.007
	(0.019)	(0.014)	(0.014)
I_{i9}^{η}	0.039***	0.034***	0.035***
	(0.007)	(0.010)	(0.010)
I_{i10}^{η}	0.024**	0.029***	0.027**
	(0.012)	(0.009)	(0.013)
Country fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Decile fixed effects, I_{ip}^{η}	Yes	Yes	Yes
All Control Variables	Yes	Yes	Yes
Number of observations	42,101	41,895	33,433
Number of clusters	267	264	189
R-Squared	0.13	0.13	0.13

Notes: The dependent variable $M_{ic}^V/(M_{ic}^V+M_{ic}^O)$ is U.S. intra-firm imports as a share of total U.S. imports. An observation is an HS6-country pair. All equations include country fixed effects. Regular coefficients are reported. Standard errors are clustered at the 6-digit NAICS industry level. ***, ** and * indicate significance at the 1, 5 and 10 percent levels, respectively. 'Machinery' is (total) Capital minus Buildings. 'Other Machinery' is (total) Capital minus Buildings, Computers, and Autos. I_{ip}^{η} is an indicator variable that equals one if industry i is in the p^{th} decile of headquarter intensity. 'All Control Variables' includes H_i/L_i, M_i/L_i, RD_i/Q_i, and the relevant headquarter intensity measures i.e., either capital, machinery or other machinery intensity.

low quintiles, and then a significant increase in the estimated coefficient between the third and fourth quintile: $0 \approx \hat{\gamma}_{\theta\eta 1} \approx \cdots \approx \hat{\gamma}_{\theta\eta 3} < \hat{\gamma}_{\theta\eta 4} \approx \hat{\gamma}_{\theta\eta 5}$.

Overall, the results provide support for Hypothesis 3. We find that there is indeed a cut-off level of headquarter intensity. For industries with headquarter intensity greater than this cut-off, productivity dispersion increases the share of intra-firm imports. For industries with headquarter intensity below the cut-off, the estimated relationship is much weaker and close to zero.

4. Conclusions

Antràs (2003) proposed that we think of the boundaries of the firm – i.e., the choice between outsourcing vs. foreign direct investment – in the property-rights terms of Grossman and Hart (1986). The central assumption of this approach is that vertical integration allows the U.S. firm to partially control the customized intermediate inputs produced by its foreign supplier. The implication is that we should see vertical integration in industries that intensively use the headquarter inputs produced by the U.S. firm.

An implicit presumption in Antràs (2003), which is often overlooked, is that only relationship-specific investments – i.e., investments with no or little value outside of the firm – matter for the outsourcing vs. vertical integration decision. We examine this often overlooked aspect of the property rights approach using Census data on U.S. intra-firm and arm's-length imports of 5423 products from 210 countries in 2005. As predicted by Antràs, we found that R&D, skill- and capital-intensive industries have a higher ratio of intra-firm imports to total imports. This is true even after controlling for exporter fixed effects. These results reproduce the previous results from a number of studies like Antràs (2003), Yeaple (2006) and Nunn and Trefler (2008). More importantly, when we decompose capital between specialized machinery, automobiles, buildings, and computers, we find that only capital with a low value outside of its intended use – i.e. specialized machinery – positively predicts the share of imports that are intra-firm. The other forms of machinery – all with high outside use-value, low relationship-specificity and therefore high contractibility – are not associated with greater vertical integration.

The importance of the relationship-specificity of the headquarter inputs is made explicit in Antràs and Helpman (2008), who allow for partial contractibility of headquarter and subsidiary inputs. They show that what matters for the headquarter's integration decision is the importance of non-contractible (i.e., relationship-specific) headquarter inputs relative to non-contractible supplier inputs. Relying on the framework of their model to guide our estimating equations, we find that, consistent with the predictions of their model, an increase in the non-contractibility of headquarter inputs increases the share of trade that is intra-firm. In other words, given a fixed level of capital-intensity, the greater the proportion of the necessary capital investment that is relationship-specific, the greater the share of trade that is intra-firm.

Antràs and Helpman (2004) extends Antràs (2003) and allows for firm-level heterogeneity in productivities and fixed costs that are higher for vertical integration than for outsourcing. The extension implies that the intra-firm share of U.S. imports will be highest for firms with high headquarter intensity η and high productivity θ. Using our data we also examined these predictions and found strong support for these relations in the data. In particular, we find evidence for both the multiplicative-nature of the importance of high-headquarter intensity and high productivity, and of the non-linear threshold effect predicted by the Antràs and Helpman (2004) model.

Overall, the findings of this paper provide empirical support for the central predictions in Antràs (2003) and Antràs and Helpman (2004, 2008) about the share of U.S. trade that is intra-firm.

Appendix A. Data description

Data on intra-firm and total trade are from the U.S. Census Bureau. The trade data are at the 6-digit Harmonized System (HS6) level and for the year 2005. Each shipment imported into the United States is accompanied by a form which asks about the value of the shipment, the HS10 code and whether or not the transaction is with a related party i.e., whether or not the transaction is intra-firm or at arm's length. Two parties are related if one owns at least 6 percent of the other.

Capital intensity K_i/L_i, skill intensity S_i/L_i, and material intensity M_i/L_i are constructed using data from the United States *Annual Survey of Manufactures*. The capital measures disaggregated into buildings, computers, automobiles and other machinery are from the same source. All data are from the same year as the trade data, 2005, with industries classified at the 6-digit NAICS level. We measure R&D intensity RD_i/Q_i using global R&D expenditures divided by firm sales in each industry, which are from the *Orbis* database.

Productivity dispersion of firms in industry i and country c is measured using the *Orbis* database. We calculate the standard deviation of log sales of all plants in each industry and country. See the text for details of the construction of this measure. For some countries, even if firm level data are unavailable, the *Orbis* database may still have information on some plants in the country if it is the subsidiary of a firm from another country. For these countries, only plants that are subsidiaries of multinationals will be observed, resulting in a systematically biased sample. For this reason, we only construct industry-specific productivity dispersion measures for countries that have at least 500 plants in the *Orbis* database.

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