Moving from Binondo to the “Chinese Villages” of the Suburbs: A Geographical Study of the Chinese in Metro-Manila

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Introduction

The lack of clear information regarding the Chinese Filipino population in the figures provided by the Philippine government may be taken as an indication of the decreasing number of Chinese-speaking people in the Philippines. This is due to a combination of demographic factors, viz. natural deaths and their tendency to move within the capital city itself. After 1975, the acquisition of Philippine nationality and the “Filipinization” policy in Chinese schools led to a fall of 45 percent in the total number of Chinese-speaking people in the 1990s. The language criterion is not entirely satisfactory for this assessment because it is possible that some did not declare Chinese as their mother tongue. Nevertheless, it enables us to conduct a geographical study of the places where the Chinese live.

The distribution of Chinese who have settled in the Philippines for a long time is uneven. Half of them, around 400,000, live in the capital city; the rest are spread over provincial towns (Wickberg 1998). At the same time, those who have settled in Metro-Manila comprise various groups, most of whom live close to market places and busy districts in this huge city. By looking at the statistics and the evolution of Manila, one can see that the distribution of the Chinese population has changed. Most are found in Binondo in the old city center. However, since the 1960s, the population of this area has spread into the neighboring towns (Fig. 1).
Fig. 1: Distribution of the Chinese-speaking persons in Metro-Manila in 2000.

Source: Table 11, Household population by ethnicity, sex and province, National Statistics Office, Manila, 2002.

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