

## **Boundaries and spaces in the study of the Chinatowns. The case of Manila.**

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In spite of the high concentration of Chinese rooting populations in South East Asian countries, Chinatowns as “geographical case study” haven’t been so much studied. The Chinatown or Chinese district is still the spatial transcription of the Chinese population in the place. The evolution of the Chinese district is due to different migration waves whether they are Chinese or not. The spatial aspect is not included in the studies of Chinatowns that’s why I would like to insist on this point in this communication.

Qualifying an area as “Chinatown” can be assimilated to an etiquette. Many “etiquettes” or clichés are endorsed by the Chinese areas; everybody has in mind the image of the old Chinese shopkeeper standing at the backside of his boutique. Entering this district can be seen as an access to a certain identity where the visitor can pick up a general vision of the resident community. But the numerical domination is not anymore a criterion to qualify a district as Chinese. In Manila, the Chinese are not the most numerous community in the place but they still manage the place economically. The evolution in space and time of the Chinese settlement in a city do include the changes in the city.

Maps on different scales mention Chinese areas by a zoning like on Manila or Singapore touristic maps. The name of the Chinese district is clearly mentioned by “Chinatown” or by the local name of the area as “Binondo”. When limits are traced, those ones are most of the time inaccurate. Another aspect to take into account in the spatial study is the limits or boundaries visible or invisible in the urban landscape. Chinese writings in the streets indicate the presence of Chinese population but they also integrate other places where Chinese characters are reserved to the domestic area. Frontiers are also established by mental marks but also by traditional division within the city.

A few points have to be discussed especially regarding the tools to realize spatial study in Metro Manila (available statistical datas regarding the Chinese community and population in general). The scale approach has to be determined by using the administrative boundaries (city, district, barangay) but also different urban units like the streets, urban blocks or buildings. Those elements integrated in a field work contribute to adjust the portrait of the resident community and to reduce stereotypes about it.