

Reconsidering Social History of Maritime Worlds in Southeast Asia: Perspectives from the Sama-Bajau

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On February 10, 2010, we held a workshop titled “Reconsidering Social History of Maritime Folks in Southeast Asia: Perspectives from the Sama-Bajau” at Toyo University. The Workshop was organized as the 3rd Annual Forum of Hakusan Anthropological Society and also as the 4th meeting of the Research Project on “Comparative Area Studies on Maritime Southeast Asia,” headed by the author.

The workshop aimed at discussing socio-historical dynamics of maritime communities in Southeast Asian peripheries. We hoped to provide the participants with an academic arena for comparative perspectives on the study of social history of Southeast Asian maritime world/s. The thrust of our enquiry lay in analyzing how the sea oriented societies have been formed and reorganized through the eras of modern state building as well as globalization. In the workshop specific reference was given to the Sama-Bajau, well-known maritime folks who have long maintained communities and networks over the nation-states in Insular Southeast Asia. The Sama-Bajau are dispersed widely over Southeast Asian islands, including the Sulu archipelago of the southern Philippines, the coasts of Sabah in Malaysia, and eastern Indonesia. With an approximate population of 1,100,000, many of the Sama-Bajau live along coasts and on islands.

Based on the advancements in studies on the maritime world/s in Southeast Asia, presentations of the workshop explored issues and topics essential to the understanding of the flexible and dynamic natures of the maritime communities in Southeast Asia. All the presentations were based on the recent intensive as well as extensive fieldworks of the speakers in the region.

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The "Special Theme" of the present issue of *Hakusan Review of Anthropology* focuses on the maritime societies in Southeast Asia with particular reference to the Sama-Bajau. It contains four papers written by the speakers of the above-mentioned workshops. The speakers revised the papers presented at the workshop and contributed them to this issue.

During the workshop, a special lecture was presented by a Sama-Bajau intellectual, Mr. Hadji Musa Malabong, from Sulu, the Philippines. Mr. Musa was a principal of an elementary school and also school district supervisor in Sitangkai Municipality, Tawi-Tawi, the Philippines. As a local intellectual, he has supported a number of scholars who conducted ethnographic researches in the area since the end of 1970s. On the other hand, he has collected local tales of the Sama-Bajau from his friends and relatives in the local community. Part of such oral histories was presented in his lecture. The revised version of his lecture is included in the above-mentioned papers.

Although the number of their population is relatively small, the Sama-Bajau occupy wider range of aquatic space in Insular Southeast Asia than many of the major ethnic groups. And what is unique to the Sama-Bajau is that they have historically repeated migrations in, around and across the border region of Insular Southeast Asia. As a consequence of such migrations, the settlements of the Sama-Bajau are scattered over the three nation-states, i.e. the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia. They now constitute a "national" minority in each state. The Sama-Bajau are a distinctive ethnic group not merely due to their maritime orientation, but also because of their spatial distribution.

Taking their spatial distribution and social locus in each nation-state into consideration, we may understand that research on the social histories of the Sama-Bajau would develop the possibility of a comparative study of the processes by which maritime as well as minority societies have responded to the expansion of modern states and reconstructed their own social space in Southeast Asia. The present special theme was partially designed as an attempt of such a comparative study, although most of the papers, due to several reasons, can show only preliminary notes and data concerning the comparative perspectives mentioned above.