A Preliminary Spatial Data on the Distribution of the Sama-Bajau Population in Insular Southeast Asia (<Special Theme>Reconsidering Social History of Maritime Worlds in Southeast Asia: Perspectives from the Sama-Bajau)

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A Preliminary Spatial Data on the Distribution of the Sama-Bajau Population in Insular Southeast Asia

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The Sama-Bajau constitute one of the most distinctive maritime folks in Insular Southeast Asia. They 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, and their livelihood is based on activities such as fishing, cultivation of coconut palms, and marine trade.

Until the mid twentieth century some groups of the Sama-Bajau lived on the boats and were known as sea nomads in European literatures due to their lifestyles. The population of the Sama-Bajau is widely scattered in the vast aquatic zone in Southeast Asia. As their primary place of origin or the centre of their population is ambiguous, scholars have long discussed the population flow and distribution of the Sama-Bajau in an attempt to seek their historical origins. Research on the origins of the Sama-Bajau first appeared in historical geographer D. E. Sopher's pioneering work, *The Sea Nomads* [Sopher 1977 (1965)]. Sopher examined the cultural characteristics and geographical distribution of all of the boat-dwelling groups in Southeast Asia, including the Sama-Bajau. Based on his analysis, he advanced a hypothesis that these boat-dwellers originated in the Riau Lingga archipelago off the southeast end of the Malay Peninsula. According to his hypothesis, the Sama-Bajau gradually migrated away from Riau Lingga, from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries, travelling via the western coast of Borneo, and dispersing among the Sulu islands and along the coasts of Sulawesi [Sopher 1977 (1965): 345-359].

A. K. Pallesen's linguistic study [Pallesen 1985: 245-247] and H. A. Nimmo's ethnography [Nimmo 1968: 42-50] both on the Sama-Bajau in Sulu archipelago, however, disputed Sopher's hypothesis, and suggested that the Sama-Bajau belonged to a language group that was different from those of the other boat dwellers. Further, these studies concluded that the Sama-Bajau originated in the south-western part of Mindanao, the
Philippines, and after the 10th century, spread southwards and to the eastern part of Insular Southeast Asia. Pallesen's and Nimmo's works are based on the then latest data gained through their long-term fieldworks. Therefore, their postulation that posits the south-western part of Mindanao as the Sama-Bajau's original place is seemingly more convincing than the Sopher's assumption (see also Sather [1997]).

The historical interactions among the Sama-Bajau, the traditional Southeast Asian port polities, and the colonial powers have also been examined in the historians' works on the Manguindanao Sultanate, the Brunei Sultanate, and the Sulu Sultanate that flourished in Insular Southeast Asia until the beginning of the 19th century. These studies focused on the population movements of the Sama-Bajau, including their voyages in search for maritime resources, such as trepang or shark's fin, for export to China, the securing of trading entrepots free from colonial interference, and constructing bases for piracy [e.g. Warren 1981; Laarhoven 1990].

Meanwhile, it is in my understanding less significant to seek their "true" origin from the historical essentialists' viewpoint, as the Sama-Bajau and the neighboring communities are supposed to have constantly converted their ethnic identification from non-Sama-Bajau into Sama-Bajau, or vice versa. By commenting critically on the conventional view of the historians of the insular Southeast Asia who were inclined to regard the ethnicity as a fixed premise, J. Warren maintained that Sulu populations including the Balancingi Samal, a Sama-Bajau subgroup, are composed of captives with varied ethnic attributes and their descendants. The captives were brought to the Sulu archipelago by the "pirates" which the Sulu aristocrats organized from the late eighteenth century through the nineteenth century [Warren 1981: 255]. The flexible formation of ethnicity is still evident among the Sama-Bajau and the other maritime populations as shown in the latest ethnographic surveys in the islands adjacent to Sulawesi, Indonesia [Nagatsu 2009a, 2009b].

Nevertheless, it dose not necessarily deny the importance of tracing the distributions, flows and networks of the Sama-Bajau. Rather, it is essential to examine dynamics of their population in order to reconstruct social histories of maritime Southeast Asia in the eras of modern state as well as of recent globalization. Such social dynamics as the maritime folks have typically shown are embedded as an essential component in this maritime world.
The purpose of this paper is to list the revised version of basic spatial data regarding the distribution of the Sama-Bajau which I published in 2005 [Nagatsu 2005] for the sake of the future reconstruction of the history of population movements of the Sama-Bajau. The data are based on the censuses as of 2000 of the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia and my fieldworks conducted from 1995 through 2008. Bibliographical information of the census used in this paper are as follows:

[The Philippines]

[Malaysia]

[Indonesia]
The author’s research on the digitized census 2000, Republic of Indonesia conducted at Badan Pusat Statistik (Central Bureau of Statistics), Republik Indonesia (Jl. Dr. Sutomo 6-8, Jakarta) in 2005.

As mentioned above, there is an accumulation of studies on the population flow of the Sama-Bajau. However, the studies have so far paid little attention to the Sama-Bajau in Indonesian Archipelago. We cannot examine the maritime movements of the Sama-Bajau without referring to those of the Sama-Bajau in Indonesian Archipelago. Therefore, this paper focuses on the distribution of the Sama-Bajau population in Indonesia.

The data in this paper includes 1) a map showing the distribution of the Sama-Bajau in the Philippines, Sabah, Malaysia, and Indonesia (Data 1), and 2) maps showing the main Sama-Bajau villages (desa) in and around Sulawesi, Indonesia (Data 2 and Data 3).
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Sather, C.

Sopher, D. E.
Nagatsu: A Preliminary Spatial Data on the Distribution of the Sama-Bajau Population

Warren, J. F.

Data 1  Distribution of the Sama-Bajau Population in 2000

* Population by Province in the Philippines, by Daerah (District) in Malaysia, and by Kabupaten (Regency) in Indonesia

Source: Published and digitized census 2000 of each country, and the nautical charts of the related regions
The map shows administrative villages (desa) with more than 50 souls of the Sama-Bajau Population. Source: Research on the digitized census 2000, republic of Indonesia at BPS, Jakarta and the author's fieldworks from 1995 to 2008.
The following maps show the distribution of villages where the population of the Sama-Bajau is more than 50. The village names are listed within each map. The figures in parentheses designate the population of the Sama-Bajau.