

SMALL-SCALE FISHING AMONG THE SAMA OF THE EAST COAST OF SABAH, BORNEO: COMPARISON OF LAND SAMA AND ILLEGAL SEA SAMA FISHERMEN

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This paper discusses small-scale fishing among the Sama (Bajau) inhabiting the east coast of Sabah, Borneo Island, by comparing Land Sama fishermen, who are Malaysian citizens, with Sea Sama fishermen, categorized as illegal visitors in Malaysia. Historically, the Sama have been a maritime people, with a tradition of living on boats, intensive fishing, and participation in marine trade. Recently, however, the number of Land Sama fishermen engaged in small-scale fishing has been decreasing. Two main factors appear to account for this change. First, fish catches have recently been drastically reduced owing to excessive and destructive fishing, including the use of bombing and poison; and second, new employment opportunities have become available in Malaysia that may have lured Sama away from fishing. At the same time, the population of illegal immigrant Sama has increased since the 1980s, and many of these Sea Sama fishermen are still engaged in small-scale fishing. In this paper, I will further examine why and how these illegal fishermen continue to conduct fishing off the east coast of Sabah.

Keywords: Marine trade, Sama (Bajau), Sabah, Small-scale fishing