

Special Feature

*Tamra, the Island:*  
The Desire to Restart Modernization  
and the Internal-Colonized Utopia

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## Introduction

This paper examines the TV series *Tamra, the Island* (2009), focusing on the desire to restart modernization and the ambivalence toward globalization, both of which are involved in the post-colonial imagination of modernization in South Korea.

*Tamra, the Island*<sup>1</sup> is a South Korean TV series that aired on MBC in the summer of 2009. This series is based on *soonjung manhwa* (the girls' comics) with the same title and set on "Tamra" Island (now Jeju Island) and in Hanyang (now Seoul) of 17th century Joseon under King Injo. The four lead characters are Jang Beo-jin, Park Kyu, William Spencer, and Yan Kawamura. Beo-jin, a young female diver of Tamra, is not good at diving whereas her mother is a skilled diver and a strong leader in her town. Beo-jin is depicted as adorable and cheerful, but unhappy as a diver. She hopes to leave Tamra for more adventures or to find a place where she is needed.<sup>2</sup> William, who has a crush on Beo-jin, is a castaway from England. He is an aristocrat obsessed with "Oriental" things and dreams of a life away from his mom who nags him to be a well-behaved aristocrat. Yan, known as Japanese Dutch but later suggested to be Korean, is William's friend from Asia who works for the Dutch East India Company and has taken advantage of William's "Orientalphilia" to make money. Park Kyu, a *yangban* (noble class in the Joseon Dynasty) exiled from Hanyang to Tamra, is snobby, demanding and so proud of his aristocratic entitlement that he has never dreamed of living among the common people, only to be forced to work for Beo-jin's mother and live off her family.

Before the show aired, the media promotion focused on the romance between a "blond prince" and a Joseon girl in Tamra, and Hwang Chan-bin (born Pierre Deport) from France, playing William, received the most media

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1. "Tamra" in the title refers to Jeju Island. The original Korean title *Tamna-neun Doda* is interpreted in different ways depending on the context: 1) How desirable it is, 2) Tamna is an island, and 3) The island is desirable. There is no official English website for this series, but it has been circulated on the internet with different English titles – *Tamra, the Island*, *Shipwrecked!*, and *Tempted Again*. In accordance with the promotional logo images on the MBC website, I use the title *Tamra, the Island* in this paper. This series aired in Japan under the title *Tmuna- labu ja ailando* (Tamra - Love the Island).

2. The emphasis of the TV series is on "somewhere I feel needed" while the original *manhwa* version emphasized "adventures."

attention. The promotional tag line of *Tamra, the Island* is “On the shores of Jeju Island, a blond blue-eyed foreigner washes up.”<sup>3</sup>

Despite such a newsworthy issue, ratings were consistently low and, hence, the network cut the series down from twenty 70-minute episodes to sixteen 50-minute ones.<sup>4</sup> The series did develop an enthusiastic fandom of devoted followers. The fandom largely opposed this decision to cut the episodes and reduce the time and even organized a movement to save the series, publishing large ads in daily newspapers, circulating petitions, and picketing to protest the decision. Although they failed to change the network’s decision, they succeeded in getting a full director’s cut of the series on DVDs.<sup>5</sup> Unlike the broadcast version, the DVD set has all 20 episodes. Outside of Korea the complete version is airing.

Several noteworthy attributes of *Tamra, the Island*, besides the romance, have elicited both ardent fandom and critical acclaim. Most obviously, numerous historical and socio-political references are entangled in the series: the tribute and labor drafting system, the conflict between local government

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3. Not only fans of Korean TV series but also foreigners who are residing in South Korea or involved with Korean studies showed great interest in this Korean TV series about the foreigner’s romance. The series has also received excellent coverage on English language blogs about Korea. Considering that the representation of male foreigners, especially of Western men, has been limited to sexual involvement with Korean women in literary pieces and films set in the U.S. military camp town and even invisible in mainstream media, it’s no wonder that they say, “This is nothing short of revolutionary for Korean screens” (James Turnbull, The Grand Narrative Blog, posted August 11, 2009), and “*Tamra, the Island* apparently finally portrays a relationship between a Western man and a Korean woman in some **normal** way” (Ivo Spanjersberg, Spanjersberg Blog, posted August 16, 2009 (emphasis is mine). According to the promotional press release, *Tamra, the Island* was reportedly inspired by the story of Hendrik Hamel, a Dutch seafarer who washed up on the shores of Jeju Island in 1653. Fourteen years later, when he returned to Holland, he published the journal he had written during his stay in Joseon. In the media, this show was often called “the romantic version of Hamel’s journal.”
  4. Alleged by media and several fan blogs, the timeslot was the greatest factor contributing to its low rating. Its timeslot was weekend evenings, the so-called “family timeslot” which is thought to be favored by rather conservative and conventional viewers. Another factor considered as a cause of its rating flop was its failure to cast top stars. The leading cast was mostly unknown and new to viewers.
  5. Fans raised money for filming extra parts unaired on the broadcast version by the way of pre-purchasing the (fictional) 20-episode DVD set in advance. With this fandom support, the DVD set would come out with 20 episodes, and the complete version would be aired overseas. For more information, refer to the website for objections to the early ending of *Tamra, the Island* (December 2009).

offices, the national government and religious family power, the growth of domestic/global merchant capital power, the diplomatic issue with Qing, gender, language, race, and the (post) colonial memory. The TV adaptation has added original elements not found in the *soonjung manhwa* (girls' comics), including the political machinations in Hanyang, the uprising for Tamra's independence, the merchant capital, and even the ending.

The visual quality of the TV production also attracts viewers with carefully and creatively planned production design (location setting, costume, and decorating) and well designed cinematography. Long shots and CGI, both of which are rare for Korean TV, capture Tamra's scenery. The underwater scenes, which are difficult to film and choreograph, are beautifully presented. Such time- and labor-consuming visual work is possible because considerable parts of the series were shot before airing, which is exceptional in Korean TV.<sup>6</sup>

## The Ambivalence to Global Capital

The first episode of *Tamra, the Island* begins with animated pop-up book images with a voiceover out of diegesis which tells viewers where and when the drama is set. In this sequence, the voiceover states that Joseon under King Injo was closed to the outside world while other countries were trading actively with each other across the oceans: "*Uri Joseon-man gue bada-ui sidae-e ssok ppajige doengeojo* (Only we, Joseon, didn't join the Age of Discovery)!" This introduction is created only for the TV adaptation. This strong awareness of the national seclusion, close to criticism at this introductory point, dominates the series.

The following sequence is set in England. From a bird's eye view, the

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6. As is widely known, a jerking and hasty production is common in the Korean TV drama industry: the script arrives on the day of shooting, and the filming and editing are completed on the day the episode is aired. Often, this has been criticized as debasing the quality of the TV dramas, though there is a defense for this incomplete production before airing which states that it makes the Korean TV production dynamic as a result of the interaction with viewers while airing: Depending on viewers' response and rating, the major/minor characters are shifted, the ending changes from the one supposed and the series inexpertly is extended or cut. Refer to *Hankook-ilbo* (September 17, 2009).

camera captures a western-looking town with the caption “Brighton, England, the year of 1640,” and moves to a close-up shot of an Asian-looking white jar. William is obsessed with the jar and his mother is unhappy about this. After William quarrels with his mother, Yan, a Japanese-Dutch man appears and gives a lecture about the “sea ceramic road just like aquatic silk road” which will soon link Japan and the Netherlands. Yan and William look through the window at the harbor. The next shot is of William at sea. This sequence tells viewers why and how William starts the journey to Asia.

The voiceover and Yan’s lecture, while the *manhwa* (comics) begins without them, have a crucial role for the first part of the drama to let viewers see what brought William to Tamra and thus to Beo-jin, which indicates how the story would develop. Only after viewers understand the sea trade outside of Joseon and its self-exclusion from that trade, can William leave England for Joseon and the epic begin. In addition, William doesn’t go directly to Beo-jin in the TV series unlike in the *manhwa* where Beo-jin’s finding William shipwrecked follows his departure from England. In the TV version, instead, the image of the Dutch ship which William is on is replaced by another ship image where an exiled Park Kyu is on the way to Tamra. That is, to reach Beo-jin, William (and viewers) needs to detour through Park Kyu. And then Beo-jin’s first appearance follows. However, it takes Beo-jin more time to find William on the seashore: leaving Beo-jin, the camera detours through Tamra, showing the female divers, a mysterious old man, Park Kyu’s trouble adjusting to Tamra, a ritual conducted by a respected village elder and, more significantly, Park Kyu’s encounter with Beo-jin and her family.

This seems to state that this series’ focus is different from what we see in the original comic series, which revolves around the girl, Beo-jin’s romance and dream. The romance between Beo-jin and William is relegated to a rather minor issue and the series doesn’t show much interest in Beo-jin’s growth into an independent woman in the way that the *manhwa* did. Instead, the TV series concentrates on another plot: the theft of the tributes, people who are involved with the incident, and Park Kyu’s detection.

In the series, Tamra and its people resent the heavy tribute-tax imposed by the central government. Meanwhile, several thefts of tributes take place in the village and viewers learn that Park Kyu, who disguises himself as an exile, is an undercover inspector dispatched by the government. Solving the mystery is a main theme of the first half of this series. As the drama goes on, the more

important to the plot Park Kyu becomes.

In the *manhwa*, the mystery is simple: a corrupt government official is the culprit. However, in the TV series, the case of the theft of the tributes goes far beyond smuggling. Park Kyu finds out that the respected village elder has organized the stealing of tributes; moreover, the elder's ultimate aim is to make Tamra independent. This, I would say, is why viewers should see the elder conducting the ritual and why Park Kyu had to meet him before encountering Beo-jin. The elder had built a secret military camp where he was training troops for the rebellion. His plot is uncovered by Park Kyu and the rebellion is suppressed by government troops.

The mystery of the thefts doesn't end here, but rather is unraveled while the more complicated series of political and historical issues develop. When the elder is arrested and asked to apologize for high treason, he refuses to plead guilty to the thefts and the rebellion and, instead, makes a statement which challenges and confuses viewers' standpoint on history: "What I want is only to rebuild Tamra Kingdom and to get its glorious days back, free from Joseon's exploitation." This is a reference to the historical fact that Tamra had once been a separate kingdom from Joseon. For the elder, Tamra is not a province of Joseon, but a colony. For Park Kyu as a government officer, at this moment, the idea of "Tamra as an internal colony" is rejected: stealing tributes caused by the desire for his crazy idea has caused the people more trouble than the tribute tax itself; at least the tribute tax paid for protection from foreign invasion. Meanwhile, at the elder's military camp, Park Kyu discovered a contract letter suggesting that people outside of Tamra were supporting the rebellion. The letter states, "If you send the promised tributes completely, I'll send you them, too." When Park Kyu asks the elder about it, the elder is shot to death before he can answer. The mystery remains unsolved, and the second half of the series, set mainly in Hanyang, is devoted to figuring out what the contract means.

After the elder's death, Park Kyu tries to suture the crack—the issue of the exploitation of Tamra—that the rebellion made. He gives a speech of apology for the government not taking good care of its people and promises the reduction of the tribute tax. The following sequence shows Yi-bang, a middle class officer, coming to Park Kyu and expressing regret for obeying the central government without caring about the people. This sequence seems strange and illogical because Yi-bang's talk confronts the antecedent Park Kyu's effort

to confine Tamra within the national boundaries.<sup>7</sup> The drama keeps referring to this contradictory sense of national confinement. In fact, the one who has done what is required of him as a government official is Park Kyu. Yi-bang's saying is a ventriloquy representing Park Kyu's ambivalence which is developed throughout the rest of the series. While staying in Tamra and investigating the theft of the tributes, he has been aware of the national confinement which he has taken for granted and never doubted. Yet, at this point, the only solution which he can adopt is to verify the national boundaries and to promise a better nation. However, as the series goes on, Park Kyu and viewers question this solution.

The person who shot the elder is a member of the merchant group Seorin. The leader of the group Seorin has developed another ploy behind the cooperation with the elder of Tamra. Her plan was to have the East Indian Company supply weapons for the Tamra rebellion, and to get Tamra extraterritorialized for free trade. Her plan is to overthrow the regime and to make Joseon friendlier both to international free trade and to the manufacturing industry. In fact, Yan, a friend of William, comes to Joseon not only to take care of William but also to sound out Seorin's merchant group as a dispatch from the Dutch East Company.<sup>8</sup>

Meanwhile, Seorin and Yan have one thing in common besides being merchants: both hate their national and ethnic identities; Seorin tells her employees that they work not as Joseon people, but as merchants of the Seorin group.<sup>9</sup> Yan, known as Japanese–Dutch, is originally from Joseon. He doesn't care much about shifting his nationality and mentions that he hates Joseon.<sup>10</sup> What is interesting and confusing to viewers is that their descriptions

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7. Actually, the ideas of the “nation,” the “state,” and the “regime” are formed in the modern era. Even if the setting of the drama is in the Joseon dynasty, the concepts are much different. Pointing out misconceptions in this series is not the main interest of this paper. The political concepts discussed in this paper are also modernized ones which the series and viewers mutually, mistakenly apply to the Joseon dynasty. As for the modern (trans-) forming of the nation-state in Korea, refer to Schmid (2002), Park (2003), Song (2005), and Ha (2009).

8. Although the elder is aware of her plan, he admits letting Tamra be subjugated to a Western power so that it would be free from the Joseon government.

9. In Episode 3, at her first appearance in the series.

10. He keeps warning William, saying “Don't expect Joseon people to understand you. You're just a freak to them. ... Joseon has always been a closed country. The locals are afraid of foreigners and try to kill them.” And he says to Park Kyu, “There is no reason why I, an

in this series are not completely negative. Rather, borrowing Seorin and Yan's statements and anti-national characteristics, this series keeps criticizing Joseon's isolation, its corrupted and incompetent political leaders and the necessity of opening for commerce.

## Post-Colonial Imagination: A Desperate Desire to Restart Modernization

The threat of rebellion mentioned above leads the expelled king, Gwanghaegun, and King Injo's son, Prince Sohyun, to prompt a critical revisit of Joseon's foreign policy.

Gwanghaegun, dethroned and exiled to Tamra by King Injo, is newly valued as a king of the Joseon dynasty. Prince Sohyun, a son of King Injo, had stayed in Qing for nine years and dies soon after coming back to Joseon.<sup>11</sup> In recent years, we have seen several period dramas which target a young audience, so-called "fusion *sageuk*"<sup>12</sup> set in the time when these historical political leaders were competing. In these dramas, King Injo is depicted as unreasonable, incompetent, unstable, and paranoid about Gwanghaegun or Prince Sohyun. The difference between King Injo and his opponents is supposed to be their

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international merchant, come to Joseon, closed-off to outside. I'll leave Tamra as soon as possible."

11. There is a rumor that Injo poisoned him, which has been believed by many people.
12. During recent years in the Korean TV drama industry, we have seen a newly emerging genre on Korean TV - fusion *sageuk* (period drama). This refers to a historical drama mixed with attributes usually not seen in traditional *sageuk* while targeting a young audience. The traditional *sageuk* takes its story from the well-known historical facts and usually takes place in the royal family; its main audiences are middle-aged and older people as well as families. However, in so-called fusion *sageuk*, even though they are set in historical times, the main characters and happenings are fictional, and these fusion dramas adapt traits from other genres, such as detective stories and romantic comedy. Also, the length of fusion *sageuk* is shorter (about 20 episodes) compared to the traditional *sageuk* (50-100 episodes). What I've observed and find intriguing is that most fusion *sageuk* shown during the past two years have set their stories in the Gwanghaegun or Injo eras. The examples are *Kwaedo Hong Gil Dong* (Sharp Blade Hong Gil Dong, KBS 2008), *Iljima* (A Spray of Plum Blossoms, SBS 2008), *Dol-a-on Iljima* (The Return of A Spray of Plum Blossoms, MBC 2009), and *Choigang Chilwoo* (The Strongest Seven Friends, KBS 2008) as well as *Tamra, the Island*. In 2010, *Chuno* (Slave Hunter, KBS 2010), one of the most acclaimed and highest-rated TV dramas of the year 2010, follows these examples.



approach to and relationship with the outside world, especially with Qing. Gwanghaegun is well known for his pragmatic foreign policy. Prince Sohyun is reported to be knowledgeable about Western and modern civilization because he contacted Western missionaries and scientists in Qing. Unlike these two, Injo is believed to worship only Ming, the receding dynasty at that time.<sup>13</sup>

*Tamra, the Island* embraces this favorable trend through Gwanghaegun and Prince Sohyun and engages them with other characters in its story. The old lunatic, who appears on Tamra's seashore and gives nonsense-sounding but penetrating talk, is the dethroned King Gwanghaegun. Seorin's flashback suggests that her father had been a supporter of Gwanghaegun and, for that reason, was killed by Injo.<sup>14</sup> The elder, the leader of the rebellion, and Seorin visit Gwanghaegun and try to win him over. Gwanghaegun does not join any group not because he respects the law and the king. Instead, he tells Park Kyu that he would like to travel across oceans like William if he were born again. Prince Sohyun is the only one whom Park Kyu relies on in the palace with its insane king and corrupt noblemen.

In fact, the historical assumption that Joseon could have opened itself up to the West if only Gwanghaegun and Prince Sohyun had seized power from King Injo correlates with (post-)colonial memories related to open-door policies toward external forces as a preparation step for colonization. Rather, the hypothetical assumption that we could have brought about modernization and built a modern nation state without being colonized seems not as relevant to the historical memories from the 17th-century Joseon dynasty as to the late 19th century when Korean (colonial) modernization began with Japan's involvement as a colonizer.

Indeed, this historical fantasy series carefully and intentionally shuns mentioning Japanese involvement, which is the most influential part of Korea's early modernization memory. The fact that Joseon leads a trading deal with

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13. The academic studies with a critical perspective on this trend have not been seen yet. For books about the revaluing of Gwanghaegun, refer to Han (2001) and Cho (2001).

14. There are fragmentary flashbacks for Seorin which allude to her being from a high class noble, *yangban* family that had been involved in political strife, supposedly the dethronement of Gwanghaegun; thus, her family was all killed, and only she secretly survived and somehow managed to run the largest merchant group in Joseon, all the while hiding her original identity.

the West directly is a historical fantasy.<sup>15</sup> The “internal development theory (*naejaejeok paljonron*),” which argues that Korea had the potential to establish its own modernization and modern state without (colonial) modernity brought in from outside,<sup>16</sup> desires to overcome its trauma from the modernization mediated by Japan, not from foreign modernity itself. As it were, the desire for Korea’s “internal” or “independent” modernization does not mean complete seclusion.<sup>17</sup> Rather, what the theory and *Tamra, the Island* want to overcome is the traumatic colonial memory of modernization mediated by Japan, not the memory of foreign modernity itself. *Tamra, the Island* dates back to the days before Japanese colonial modernization and utilizes historical imagination to start Korean modernization over again without Japanese involvement.<sup>18</sup>

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15. Joseon was forced to open up Joseon-Japan trade by the Japanese military force which resulted in the Treaty of Ganghwa, which meant the end of Joseon’s inclination toward China in terms of a foreign relationship and the pre-stage for being colonized by Japan. As a result of this treaty, three seaport towns (Pusan, Inchon and Wonsan) were opened and extraterritorialized while granting permission for Japanese people’s economic activity.

16. Representative work is Park and Kim (1979).

17. Actually, modernity is always formed by contacting the outside. In this sense, colonial modernity is a condition for modernization not only for the East but also for the West. Without colonization, the Western modernity would have been impossible. Western modernity was achieved when they encountered the non-Western, thus the colonizing non-Western is internalized in the Western modernity as discussed by James M. Blaut (1993).

18. As previously discussed, using the 17th-century Joseon as a setting has become one of the most dominant trends in recent Korean period dramas on television, yet this focus is a desperate attempt that resulted from troubles associated with directly representing the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Korea, when Korean (colonial) modernization began with Japan’s involvement as a colonizer. This reaction is more understandable if we recall the so-called *Iljesidae* films (Japanese-colonial-period films) that flourished from 2007 to 2009. The films — although responding to newly conducted studies in history and cultural studies that sought to deconstruct national narrative — foreshadowed the individual as a counterpart of Korean ethnicity attracted by the lure of modernity and materialism but who does not care about the fate of the nation or its independence. Yet whether they want to or not, they ultimately become involved with the organization for Joseon/Korean independence and a return to the national narrative. In *Modern Boy* (2008), the lead character falls in love with a woman from an undercover organization for Korean independence and then commits a suicide bombing to attack top imperial Japanese officials for her. In *Radio Days* (2007), the lead character is preoccupied with radio broadcasts and becomes entangled with a terrorist organization for Korean independence, ultimately helping the organization in its efforts. In *Private Eye* (2009), a private detective, cynical about the outside world and caring only about money, is finally dispatched to The Hague in the Netherlands as an emissary by King Kojong, a last king of the Joseon Dynasty. These films tried to suggest and represent another Korean modernity that differed from their precedential Japanese colonial films which revolved around the pro-/anti-Japan dichotomy; however, they failed in such efforts

However, despite this sympathy for the open-door foreign policy and the longing for re-modernization, the series ends up settling for national confinement and self-isolation. The Dutch ship never arrives because Seorin fails to involve Prince Sohyun in her plan to open Tamra for free trade and commerce. She decides to take Tamra by military force with the help of the East India Company. Park Kyu finds out about the plot and defeats Seorin with the aid of the local military and the people. Seorin's ship is sunk with all of its silver on board and *Seorin* rejects being helped to save her life. Meanwhile, the ship belonging to the Dutch East India Company watches the turbulence in Tamra and returns to Europe.

This ambivalence about the open-door policy and final re-affirmation of the national confinement observed in *Tamra, the Island* seems consistent with the current awareness of global capital which has blurred national boundaries. The reason that the desire for restarting modernization by embracing the Western modern capital is negated is not because this series endorses nationalism. *Sang-do*, which aired in 2001-2002, right after the IMF crisis, is a period drama about a 19th century Joseon merchant, Im Sang-ok. In the series, his business' engagement with foreign capital is idealized as helpful for the accumulation of national capital and household economy. However, in the last few years, *Sang-do* is no longer highly regarded. People do not believe that nation and nationalism would bring happiness, but neither does globalization. Such ambivalence seen in *Tamra, the Island*, thus, represents this insularity in a post-national/global capital era in South Korea. It cannot fall back on nostalgia for nationalism because it has a strong hostility to national seclusion and to Korea's colonial past.

## **The Predestined Fail and Tamra as the Internal-Colonized Utopia**

In this cul-de-sac, the line of flight of *Tamra, the Island* is to escape into an internally colonized utopia – Tamra. Tamra, now Jeju Island, is idealized where every hybridity is accommodated and any hierarchical power is deconstructed

as well as where exotic scenery, food, and climate are celebrated as they are in other media.

*Tamra, the Island* has two representatives of class power in it: an elite man and a white<sup>19</sup> man--and deprives them both of their power. No one is despised and excluded by others. Upon arriving at Tamra, Park Kyu sees that his power as *yangban* does not work and he realizes that he doesn't need to inconvenience himself to keep his dignity. He has suppressed seasickness on the way to Tamra, but his seasickness does not offend anyone. The encounter with Beo-jin's mother shows a power relationship reversed and de/re-constructed. The government assigns a family to house Park and takes him to the head of the family. Choi, Beo-jin's mother, is not happy with this assignment because an exiled *yangban* is a useless mouth to feed. Park is humiliated that he cannot get the respect he thinks that he deserves. The mother says that if he doesn't listen to her, she won't accept him and then she tries to negotiate reducing the tribute tax in exchange for housing him. Villagers call him "gwiyangdari (exile)," a pejorative Tamra slang term referring to an exiled *yangban*. The visual design also shows that she dominates Park Kyu who has class and gender power outside of Tamra. In their first encounter, Choi is shown full-screen with medium close-up shots while Park Kyu is shown with medium shots surrounded by police and villagers mocking him. Park Kyu ends up living in the storage room and gathering persimmons and oranges, making straw sandals and fertilizing the soil to pay for his food. Moreover, when William was discovered by villagers, they do not report him to police even though this violates the national law. They sympathize with William's situation because getting shipwrecked and washed up on neighboring foreign shores could happen to anyone. They recall that their own ancestors had been helped out when castaways in Ryukyu, Tsushima, and Vietnam. Later, even when Park Kyu is revealed as a government agent and William introduces Western technology, the power relationship is not changed. The scenery image of Tamra with CG and extreme long shots strengthen the Utopian imagination of Tamra.

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19. Although I want to avoid referring to "color," in order to invoke the power relationship the Korean word "*baek-in* (white people)" brings, I am going to use the "white" man when I mention the Caucasian and those close to the Caucasian people.

The race, gender, and class identities among *Beo-jin*, *Park Kyu* and William do not become an issue until they arrive at Hanyang. In contrast to in Tamra, in Hanyang, the class and ethnic differences of the three are affirmed. *Beo-jin* even cannot speak to Park Kyu due to the gap of hierarchy between them. Even though Park Kyu fabricates Beo-jin's family as a highest class *yangban* and lets his mom believe that Beo-jin is expecting his baby so that his mother can let Beo-jin stay at his house, the only position allowed to Beo-jin is to be a concubine for Park Kyu.<sup>20</sup> As for William, since his presence itself is against the law, his good will is misunderstood and his ignorance of Joseon culture becomes a serious crime, he has turned evil, and finally is used as a trap for Park Kyu and Prince Sohyun. Even the romance should be exclusive; Beo-jin is forced to choose between William and Park Kyu, neither of whom is destined to create a happy ending due to the race and class differences. Likewise, Beo-jin's mother who comes to Hanyang at Park Kyu's request is not as strong and competent as in Tamra. She is still wise and thoughtful, though in Hanyang all she can do is to take care of Beo-jin while relying on the generosity from Park Kyu and his would-be fiancée. Leaving Park Kyu's, Beo-jin gets a job, which proves her ability to survive, only to be hired by Seorin, who wants to use her as a trap to destroy Park Kyu.

This series takes much care with visualizing, and thus in almost every shift in sequences, viewers see the establishing shot. While the establishing shots in Tamra are beautiful and sunny, the first bird eye's shot of Hanyang shows an overcast sky. Some establishing shots are taken from a low angle. Sometimes Seorin watches over Hanyang from the Seorin merchant group complex on the hill while planning to dominate the city. The scenery of Hanyang alienates people. When Beo-jin's mother arrives with two diver friends at Park Kyu's house, the low angled shot shows the large house representing Park Kyu's power in Hanyang. When they appear in Hanyang, they look like small dots in a crowded market in a high angled shot, which seems to represent Beo-jin's mother's degraded status in the city. The only shot of beautiful Hanyang scenery is when Beo-jin imagines Tamra's sea.

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20. He is not yet married. But to have Beo-jin as his concubine, his family decides to marry him to a girl from the high class *yangban*. Interestingly, to make Hanyang's life look miserable, *Tamra, the Island* brings conventional clichés of *gajok drama* (Korean family drama).

In addition, the gorgeous art work only focuses on luxury goods such as the interior items or costumes. An Jin Soo, in an article on South Korean historical drama of the 1960s, argues that visual opulence and tragic story promote an ambivalent view of history; the films simultaneously glorify and denounce the past. The visual part shows the past as attractive; at the same time, the tragic story is often melodramatized to protect the main characters and historical agents from being blamed for the tragic history. According to him, this melodramatic pattern encourages viewers to inquire into the true cause of the tragic history without focusing on a single agent (An 2007). However, in the Hanyang part of *Tamra, the Island*, the visual opulence and tragic story create a different effect from the historical dramas discussed by An. The gorgeous items are prominently presented in very awkward and unpleasant situations, such as the conflict between Park Kyu's mother and Beo-jin, Beo-jin's prisonlike life in Park Kyu's house, and the prince's welcoming party where King Injo reveals his hostility towards the prince. In addition, these painful episodes are never melodramatized in this series. There is no room for sympathy in the part of the drama set in Hanyang. This series doesn't allow viewers melodramatic and nostalgic understanding of events in Hanyang. The outside of Tamra's chronotope, using Bakhtin's terminology, is current South Korea or everywhere in contemporary times; the King is insane, and his courtiers are corrupt. The prince is smart, but timid. The government is incompetent to handle global capital and the domestic capital desires to be globalized by reforming the nation(-state), which are forces we encounter and manage every day.

Between Tamra and Hanyang, there is liminal Haenam, the place for the shift from Tamra to Hanyang. At the end of Episode 9,<sup>21</sup> when Park Kyu is about to sail from Tamra, Beo-jin comes and begs for William's life. At this moment, she calls him "*Nauri* (officer)" not "*gwiyangdari* (exile)" for the first time. Park Kyu lashes out at her saying, "How dare a lowly (speaks) to me..." The last shot shows Park Kyu on the boat with his voice over narrating, "Forget.

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21. William is revealed to the local government while entangled with the theft case, and Park Kyu is forced to take him to Hanyang, where William is supposed to be killed. Park Kyu tries to let him escape secretly, but William rejects it because he cannot go with Beo-jin. However, she, as well as other female divers, cannot leave *Tamra* without permission from the national government.

Must forget.” This ending surprised viewers who expected a romance when the set moved to Hanyang, the outside world that Beo-jin has dreamed about.

However, at the moment of Park Kyu’s departure for Hanyang, the class barrier arises. Park Kyu and William, on the way to Hanyang, stop in Haenam, the first mainland territory, and Beo-jin catches up with them. The tenth and eleventh episodes are about Haenam mediating Tamra and Hanyang. The first sequence of Episode 10 is William’s nightmare about being guillotined. He wakes up to find himself in not much of a different situation; the police in Haenam beat him and earn money by displaying him to people. Meanwhile, Park Kyu is attacked and wounded by Seorin men, and William saves his life. They hide in the house of a reclusive pottery maker. Soon Beo-jin, running away from Tamra, arrives. There, the three of them enjoy their remaining days – Park Kyu and William build their relationship, and William learns how to make pottery - the very reason he had left England.

After Park Kyu has recovered from the wound, Park allows William, who saved his life, to escape. This time, William is ready to leave because Beo-jin stays with him. And then Park Kyu is leaving for Hanyang, going back to his original life as a *jangban*. Every problem seems to have been solved; however, Park Kyu’s face sometimes has a foreboding look. He even cries out alone when William and Beo-jin leave. In a sense, Park Kyu’s anxiety is his heartbreak over losing Beo-jin. However, regardless of his attachment to Beo-jin, the ending of the Haenam part is so dark; Beo-jin sees an assassin from Seorin on the way out to sea with William and comes back to Park Kyu to alert him. William is disappointed with Beo-jin’s return to Park Kyu and gives up trying to escape from Joseon, which means endangering his life. He follows Beo-jin, and the three of them are arrested. At that moment, Park Kyu is embarrassed by their gathering again, and sadly says, “*Urideul-ui sigan-eun yeogikkaji-da* (Our time ends here)” as if he had known in advance.

And then, the most bizarre image in this series is shown: William’s face covered with black stains. Before leaving the pottery maker’s house, Beo-jin dyed William’s hair black. The dyeing represents William’s assimilation with Beo-jin and Joseon, and their intimate relationship. However, in the end, the dye smears down his face. Even though Beo-jin has returned, Park Kyu, the only one who knows how Hanyang life goes on, sorrowfully says their time has ended.

William’s horrible image and Park’s statement ends the in-between days



in Haenam. They arrive at Hanyang, where the sky is overcast. Frustrated in Hanyang, Park, Beo-jin and William go back to Tamra to protect the island from Seorin and the Dutch East Indian Company. Right before they return, Park and William are arrested and sentenced to die on charges that they had planned to overthrow the king. Before the execution, they give a last speech to King Injo about how idealized and generous Tamra is and how many things they had learned from its people. At that moment, as if destined to, a letter from Gwanghaegun in Tamra comes. It proves Park's and William's innocence and reveals Seorin's plot. Moved by the letter, the King releases Park and William.

They return to Tamra, and the deal between Seorin and the Dutch East Indian Company is broken. The huge Dutch ship off Tamra's coasts never lands. In the end, nothing happened that contradicts the actual history facts. The ambivalence between the desire to restart modernity by opening to global capital earlier and the awareness of its failure allows a Utopian fantasy by internally colonizing and isolating Tamra. Some viewers pointed out that Park does not bring the military to Tamra. However, when considering the Utopian fantasy, it is logical that the conflict should be fought by Park and the people of Tamra alone.





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## Abstract

This paper examines the TV series *Tamra, the Island* (2009), focusing on the desire to restart modernization and the ambivalence toward globalization, both of which are involved in the post-colonial imagination of modernization in South Korea. The TV series *Tamra, the Island*, which aired on MBC in the summer of 2009, is set in 17th century Joseon under King Injo—a period favored by other recent television dramas as well. This paper also explores why this setting, where the confrontation between King Injo and Gwanghaegun/Prince Sohyeon is foregrounded, is significant to recent Korean period dramas while considering its relevancy to post-colonial trauma and globalization. Also discussed are the issues of how Tamra Island (now Jeju Island) has become an internally colonized utopia at the cul-de-sac of the predestined failure in restarting modernization and the ambivalence between embracing global capital and reinforcing national confinement in this TV series.

**Keywords:** *Tamra, the Island*, King Injo, internal-colonization, colonial modernity, post-coloniality