

Variant Landscape: Bam-island

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1. Introduction

There is an uninhabited island in the heart of Seoul, a city of 10 million. The name is Bam-island(Bam-seoum). Currently, it is designated as a nature conservation area as a representative migratory place in South Korea and is a land that people cannot enter. In Bam-island, the home of many migratory birds, unplanned trees are intertwined with each other, and sometimes trees are completely covered with bird droppings. In contrast, Seoul is a completely modernized city. Public transportation is very developed, works in skyscrapers, and apartments in the form of large complexes are the main residential space. In this regard, Bam-island is a place where you can find rare scenery in the current scenes of Seoul. However, despite the fact that Bam-island is located between Gang byeon buk-ro, which crosses Seoul from east to west, and Yeouido, centrally located in Seoul, these features are invisible to Seoul citizens. Most of the time, when you pass by car or subway, you can see Bam-island through the window for a while. In other words, Bam-island is an island that is relatively isolated from the daily lives of people in Seoul, unlike other islands located on the Han River, which are practically used, such as the Political and economical center and Citizen Park.

Seoul is one of the fastest cities in the world. Even in a short time, many buildings are demolished and newly built. In particular, during the modernization process, the appearance of Seoul changed rapidly. As an artificial shore was built in all sections of the Han River, the riverside of the natural terrain disappeared from the Han River, and instead, a city park for concrete shores was created. Bam-island also had a sedimentary appearance based on the remains of the island that once disappeared and remained in this process (Chung-Hyun 2013, p. 1). Bam-island is changing at a different speed than its surroundings. The representation of Bam-island is transformed into various forms as needed during the modernization process of Seoul. Currently, various changes are used as marketing phrases such as 'Bam-island View' and 'Best View' in Seoul, where large apartment complexes are filled, and it is also a material for capitalist society. This paper examines what changes Bam-island has undergone in the course of modernization in Seoul and pays attention to Bam-island as a physical and thinking space to reconsider the process of modernization in Seoul.

2. Blown-up Land



Seoul Photo Archive, 1968. 02. 10.

During the Joseon Dynasty, river water went around wrapping around Bam-island, and there was a boat floating around the island. Bam-island and Yeouido next to each other were connected by sandy beaches. There were two islands with a large quantity in the Han River, but when the quantity was not large, the two islands were connected by white sand. This white sandy beach was an expansive area estimated at 8 to 10 million square meters, and it was also a leisure space for Seoul citizens at that time. In other words, Bam-island was a place where there were various landscapes created by natural terrain. Bam-island explosion made this island territory into Seoul's modernization history. Bam-island was blown up on February 10, 1968, at 3:00 p.m. The bombing of this island was planned for the construction of Yeouido as part of the Han River Coastal Development Plan in the 1960s. Yeouido is South Korea's political and economic center with parliament houses, broadcasting stations, and financial institutions.



The Dong-A Ilbo, 1968. 02. 10.
A panoramic view of the village of Bamseom before the explosion. The entire area around the village was covered with sand.

There were many reasons for the explosion of Bam-island to build Yeouido. First of all, the Han River periodically flooded, so they needed a way to prepare for the flood. In this way, a plan was prepared to build a dike around Yeouido to prepare for the flood. At that time, even if Yeouido was built, it was thought that Bam-island should be removed so that the flow of the river would not interfere. Also, a large number of stones and gravel needed to make the Yeouido embankment was required, and the geographical proximity of Bam-island and Yeouido could reduce the budget for transportation of goods. For this reason, after intensively digging the center of Bam-island, this island was divided into 10 pieces, and sand sedimentation occurred little by little based on this debris.



Revised Yeouido Development Plan, Dong-A Ilbo, 1971. 08. 10.

On Bam-island, people lived even before the explosion. They were 443 people in 78 households and were forced to move to the Wowsan-mountain in Changjeon-dong, Mapo-gu, after the bombing was decided. Residents of Bam-island mainly repaired and built numerous ships based on their geographic advantage. However, due to the Korean War, the downstream of the Han River became the boundary between the two Koreas, which limited the movement of the ship to the Han River. Due to this, the residents of Bamseom made a living by making small and medium-sized boats such as playboats and fishing boats. However, their job was gradually disappearing from the modernization of Seoul. This is because after the 2nd Han River Comprehensive Development, it was not possible to float freely on the Han River, and as many bridges on the Han River were constructed. Throughout modernization, there are no needs for boats anymore. The bombing resulted in the loss of Bam-island, their residence, and the workplace, and most of the island residents turned to carpenters for their livelihoods. In particular, many of them worked mainly at the construction site of an apartment that was under construction on a large scale along the Han River. It is ironic that those who were forced to move during the modernization process in Seoul participated in the construction of apartments, a symbol of modernization. Landscapes around the Han River that were changing, including apartments, and Bam-island are reunited with the Seoul Olympics.

3. Clean Nature

In 1988, Bam-island undergoes another change. The Seoul Olympic Games were held in South Korea, which was the driving force behind Seoul's landscape. At the time, the Seoul Olympics was an important stage for South Korea to emerge as a developed country around the world. The slogan of the Seoul Olympics was Seoul to the world and the world to Seoul. At this time, the government had the intention to show the advanced appearance of Seoul to the world by hosting the Seoul Olympics. It was also a time to reorganize urban planning to introduce Seoul as a type of city in developed countries.



Seoul Photo Archive, 1989. 01. 20.

Among the Olympics, cycling, racewalk, and marathon are the only ones performed outside the stadium. Therefore, a marathon is a big event in which the image of the city is exposed to the world through the media over a long period of time. What constitutes the marathon course is connected with the image of the city. Until the 1980s, marathon course types were created in a way that encompasses the entire city like the 1972 Munich Olympics and the 1976 Montreal Olympics. However, the Seoul Olympics consisted of the Han River and Gangnam New Town courses, which include large apartment complexes and buildings, without passing through the old town of Jongno and Eulji-ro, which contain historical scenery. (Sang-Yeon 2020, p. 81). The Seoul Olympics did not constitute a marathon course centered on the Han River from the beginning. In 1983, the initial draft of the marathon course was decided based on the original downtown mixed with cultural assets and skyscrapers. However, in 1985, the Seoul Metropolitan Government raised problems due to air pollution in the old city, traffic conditions, and undeveloped scenery in the city center. After a re-discussion, in October 1985, the Seoul Olympic Marathon course was selected as an area around the Han River. The reason for this was that there were no traffic problems to worry about when passing through the old city, the surrounding scenery was not monotonous, and it was possible to promote the more developed look of Seoul.

In particular, Han River Comprehensive Development, which was initiated by the President at the time in 1981, influenced this decision. The purpose of this project was to get rid of scenes that were not developed from the perspective of foreigners. At the time, the Han River Comprehensive Development Plan consisted mainly of the development of park green areas around the Han River and the construction of the Olympic Road. In particular, in the middle of 1985, when the Han Riverside Marathon Course was discussed, the completion of the Han River Comprehensive Development was nearing completion. In addition, the apartment districts around the Han River and the Gangnam area at the time also had an impact. At that time, the Seoul Metropolitan Government evaluated that large apartment complexes and buildings surrounding the Han River look great, comparable to any river that flows through the cities of developed countries (Sang-Yeon 2020, p. 87).



Seoul Olympic Library, 1988. 10. 02.

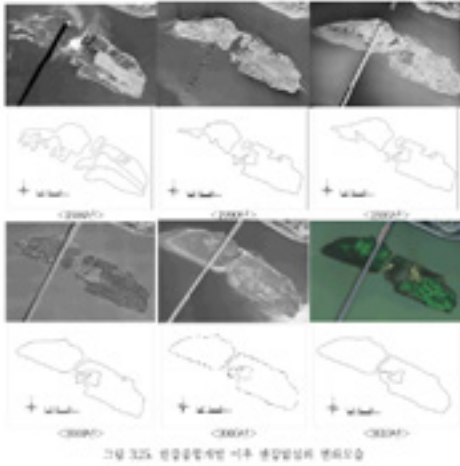
The Olympic marathon course departed from the Jamsil main stadium, passed through the roads in Seocho Gangnam area, entered Yeouido, and returned to the Jamsil main stadium. Yeouido is located at the return point in the middle of the marathon course, and as the marathon runners cross the Mapo Bridge, Bamseom was included as a marathon scene. Bam-island was still under construction when the Seoul Olympic Marathon course was actively discussed. Construction lasted until the mid-1980s and ended in 1986. At that time, almost no trees remained, and only herbaceous vegetation was formed (Chung-Hyun 2013, p.83). After construction was completed, Bam-island was recognized as a habitat of migratory birds, and the Han River Management Office controlled access to the public. Then, in 1988, 58,000 plants were planted such as willow, trees, and brief. (Seoul Hanriver website) Considering the changes in Bam-island in chronological order, it seems that the change in Bam-island was part of the creation of a modern urban landscape at the time, as the banning of island access and planting of large-scale plants took place the following year after the Seoul Olympic Marathon course was set.



Seoul Olympic Library, 1988. 10. 02.

At that time, the image of the urban landscape that the Korean government wanted to show to the outside through the marathon course was a modern and developed landscape of Seoul. In particular, through the image of the Han River, which accounts for 45% of the marathon course, the image of clean nature, and modern skyscrapers.

4. Revived Land



Chung-Hyun Oh et al., 2013.
Research on the basic plan of Ramsar wetland in
Bamseom, Seoul Green Environment Center, p. 82

Bam-island is getting bigger now. Bam-island currently has an area of 279,000 m², which is 6.2 times the area of the island in 1966. Natural sedimentation along the flow of the Han River causes the soil to accumulate on the islands and the trees grow on it, increasing the area. This expansion of the island is now linked to the special situation of the Han River. The Han River Comprehensive Development Plan was established by architect Kim Soo-Geun in the late 1960s. The main content of this plan was to make the Han-river a lake by installing beams upstream and downstream of the Han River. The first reason was that the area around the Han River was a chronic flooding area, so measures were needed to create a city. The second was the background of the division of North and South Korea. The lower part of the Han River is the point where the Yeseong River and the Imjin River meet, and it was the part where the territory of North and South Korea meets on the river. In other words, the downstream of the Han River became a dangerous territory for South Korea and North Korea, and two beams were needed to cut off the flow of the river that continued with North Korea.

Since then, the Han River has a wide river width of 1 km, and it cannot have an industry function. Instead, a large apartment complex was built along the Han River. After the construction of two beams, the flow of the Han River slowed rapidly, which accelerated the sedimentation of Bam-island. Bam-island is still expanding at an average of 4,400m each year. In recent years, Bam-island has been called a restored land by the power of nature and a revived land. In recent articles about Bam-island, it is described as resurrection with natural earth, sand, and life gathered over the years to recover itself as a blue island, and a miraculously revived island. In other words, Bam-island is now read as a land of nature that is transformed into the power of nature itself. This land is becoming a symbol that reminds us of the greatness of nature in Seoul, which is highly dense and lacks public space associated with nature. The revival of the nature story through Bam-island is so fascinating that many people seem to believe it. In particular, former Seoul Mayor Oh Se-hoon visited Bam-island in 2011 and said, "Bam-island, which has become an uninhabited island under the name of development, is now transforming into a representative ecological space that restores naturality and historicity. It also touches the core banner of the Han River Renaissance project." (Dong-Sam 2011) The Han River Renaissance was a project that the previous Mayor Oh Se-hoon promoted around the Han River with the theme of recovering nature, improving accessibility, and creating a cultural foundation in 2006.

The image of Bam-island is read as an epic of revival, and this narrative becomes a living campaign image for nature conservation in the city center. However, after the bombing, Bam-island was incorporated into the context of Seoul's modern development and has never escaped ever since. Bam-island, which is called the power of nature, is still under the control of people. Representatively, Seoul City patrols around Bam Island twice a day, allowing ships to pass a certain distance from Bam Island. In particular, intensive management is carried out from April to June during the spawning season and from December to February during the winter migratory season. Garbage collection and food supply of winter birds are carried out regularly, and when large-scale waste occurs due to flooding, the waste is irregularly removed(Chung-Hyun 2013, p. 64). Not all of Bam-island is made by human hands, but at the same time, it is not only natural forces without human intervention. Bam-island is a place where natural phenomena, the political situation of the Korean Peninsula, and the process of modernization accordingly have become the form.

5. Interior Space



If you just open the curtain, you can see the Han River at a glance, and the Happiness Index is charged to the 1.6 billion won apartment. Insight, 2019. 03.27.

Bam-island has been blown up, numerous plants have been planted, and now it is a habitat for plants and animals, and the area of the island is expanding. The other thing to note on Bam-island is that it is impossible to visit, so there are eyes to observe the island from outside. These gazes make Bam-island an interior space even though it is an outdoor space. In fact, with the explosion in 1968, it was difficult for the general public to access the island. Construction continued until the mid-1980s, and even after construction was completed, access was banned to protect migratory birds. Considering that even Bam-island previous residents were unable to visit the island, we can guess that it was a strict rule created by the nation.

There are many luxury housing around Bam Island. Bam-island Hyundai Apartment. Bamseom Hyundai Apartment. Raemian Bamseom Avenue. Hangang Bamseom Chiayi. Bamseom Anusville, Bamseom Ssangyong Classic. Bamseom River Berville. These are all the names of apartments located around Bam Island. Bamseom is included in the name of the apartment itself, and most of them include the Han River view. In addition, these apartments promoted the view of the Han River including Bam-island, and the house price rose sharply. Currently, apartment blocks along the Han River serve as a kind of screening door between the center of the city and Han River. Instead, people living in Han Riverside apartments have the privilege of looking at the Han River in their living room. In other words, the view of the Han River in Seoul is itself capital. Bam-island, inhabitable, and invisible, now become the window of a luxury apartment. The island seen through the window is now land, but at the same time, it is a painting and a decoration. We don't know what the scenery seems like inside Bam-island. The only lens we have is the gaze towards Bam-island from outside. In addition, due to the large-scale housing complex, this gaze has a high density. Bam-island is surrounded by a lot of gazes on the Han River, and Bam-island is inevitably perceived from the outside.

6. Conclusion

While there is a point of view of Bam-island in high-end apartments surrounding the Han River, there is also the point of view of Bam-island residents who have been expelled from their hometown. It is called their Sil-Hyang-Min in Korean. That means that they are the one who has lost your hometown. The residents of Bam-island were also not the mainstream to actively voice their situation in society and were driven out of their hometowns. Bam-island is also a land that was once rejected during the modernization process in Seoul. Since then, Bam-island has been used in different socio-political contexts, and residents of Bam-island continued their lives in another space. Throughout these times, the stories of people who have lost their homes and land seem to continue to leave traces on the map of Seoul. The story of Bam-island and the people of the island is an important trace that allows the Seoul modernization process to be viewed from a different angle. The stories of the two continued to be influenced by the socio-political changes and become the window to rethink the modernization process in Seoul.

On Bam-island, there was a small temple dedicated to the spirit of the village, and this space is the spiritual center of the island. This is called Bu-guen-dang. The people of Bam-island held religious events in the village on the first day of the year each year and wished goodbye and blessings of the village. When the bombing was decided, they had to leave their homes urgently, but they carried some part of the Bu-guen-dang. Even after being forcibly moved to the area of Wowsan-mountain in Mapo-gu, the people of Bam-island established the Bu-guen-dang at the place where Bam-island came into sight. (You-jin 2012, p. 200). The Bu-guen-dang religious event is performed on Bam-island. Since 1998, the resident of the island had been able to visit their homeland through the "Bams-island Residents Homecoming Event" sponsored by Mapo-gu and



Bam-island residents Homecoming Day Lee Jeong-hun, Yonhap News, 2009. 09. 19.



Do you remember Bamseom? The Hankyoreh, 2018. 04. 26.

hosted by the Bam-island Conservation Society. Today, a homecoming event is held in early September, before Chuseok, a big holiday in South Korea. The people see their homeland where no traces of their lives can be found. The vast sandy beaches they played when they were children turned into the waters of the Han River. There are no houses they lived in but there are only trees and grass on the earth. Apartments and buildings can be seen over unfamiliar land for them. However, residents of Bam-island still hold the Bu-guen-dang religious event once a year and wish people's peace and abundance in Bam-island.

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