

## Liquid Area Studies —North East Asia in Motion

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This presentation uses the historical example of Mount Kūmgang as a starting point for an inquiry into the possibility of a North East Asian regional perspective. Through choosing a specific place and investigating the changes to the network of routes through which that place is connected to the wider world, we can find out both significant things which concern the region as a whole and learn how regions themselves have changed historically.

What I wish to propose in this presentation is the need to rethink the concept of an “area” (or “region”) that has served as a kind of received presumption for all Area Studies to date. If we consider “areas” as places that exist purely on the basis of human action such as travel, commercial trade and communication, then any individual “area”, rather than being something fixed and imbued with geographical roots, becomes more like a fountain constantly changing shape. From this “Liquid Area Studies” perspective we can gather that, firstly, “areas” can adopt a plurality of forms; secondly, that often “areas” overlap each other; and thirdly, that “areas” are never eternally unchanging. The approach of liquid area studies focuses on “flows” and “whirlpools” as two factors related to the interactions of human beings.

History shows that it is people who make areas. In other words, areas are made through both large-scale political strategies as well as an infinite number of small-scale connections made by normal people engaged in travel and exchange across national borders. In all kinds of places – not only North East Asia – the flows and whirlpools of human interaction which create areas can be violent or peaceful but they are always made and supported by human efforts. The future of Mount Kūmgang as one example of one of these whirlpools of human action which has continued to change over a thousand years of history is in the hands of the people of the region and has the power to influence either the integration or breakdown of the region as a whole.