



Limbo or Liminality?

- A Perspective on Unifying Korea from Post-socialist Studies

June 05, 2019 (Wednesdays) 6-8pm, Wilhelmstraße 133, Room 30

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Abstract:

Liminality is a widely used concept referring to the betwixt-and-between stage in rituals, not only in tribal cultures but also in our social life as we can see in rites of passage. Victor Turner highlighted this stage as the stage of “transition,” because here everything is suspended and unknown for the participant, even though the outcome is structurally predictable for others. Nevertheless, liminality creates a feeling of togetherness, or *communitas*, which reinforces social structure in the very end. Limbo, on the other hand, is marked by the absence of *communitas* and represents a state of permanent liminality. Can we characterize the three decades after the Wende in Europe with these concepts, as a period of liminality or limbo? It seems that answers have shifted from the former to the latter. Recent reflections on post-socialist transformations in Europe pay more attention to global politics, neoliberalism, class stratification, and political populism. Based on these discussions, this lecture shall try to illuminate the relevance of post-socialist studies of Europe to developing processes towards unification in Korea. In a similar vein, the popular use of German unification as an ideal model in Korea will be critically examined.

Dong Ju Kim is an Assistant Professor at KAIST and teaches anthropology, history, gender, and post-colonial studies courses in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences. He received his PhD in anthropology and history at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. His research interests include post-socialist transformations in Eastern Europe, food production and environment, semiotic anthropology, science and technology studies, German social thought in the nineteenth century, and its translation and influence in nineteenth-century East Asia.