Japan Geoscience Union Meeting 2015
(May 24th - 28th at Makuhari, Chiba, Japan)

SIT35-11 Room:106 Time:May 26 17:15-17:30

Detection of an asthoenospheric thermal event: approach from lithospheric mantle xenoliths

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Convective mantle heat flux through the continental lithosphere is not well constrained because of high heat generation in the overlying continental crust (Sclater et al., 1980; Pollack et al., 1993; Jaupart et al., 2007; Jaupart and Mareschal, 2007). Its proper estimation and its temporal variation through the earth's history is important to know the overall rate of heat loss from the convecting interior of the earth (Labrosse and Jaupart, 2007; Korenaga, 2008), although the earth is thought to be losing most of its internal heat through the oceanic lithosphere (~70%; Jaupart et al.,2007; Mareschal et al., 2012). The sub-continental lithosphere-asthenosphere boundary (LAB) is the interface through which entropy transported to the asthenosphere beneath the LAB via mantle convection from the depth of the earth is passed on to the entropy transfer in either steady or transient state through the sub-continental lithosphere (Jaupart and Mareschal, 2007; Michaut and Jaupart, 2007; transient important). There are three important mechanisms of entropy transfer through the LAB: heat conduction, soid-state flow, and magmatism (Jaupart and Mareschal, 2007). The upper most zone of the asthenosphere acts as the upper thermal boundary layer of the convecting mantle and that the heat was transferred via heat conduction in the continental lithosphere with or without LAB modification (thickening or delamination/thermal erosion of the lithosphere; Moore et al., 1999; Jurine et al., 2005). Another important aspect of the sub-continental LAB is that it roughly corresponds to a boundary where melting and segregation of melt take place either via decompressional melting in the asthenosphere or melting of the lithospheric mantle induced by the heat input or material influx. This implies that entropy can be transferred from the convecting interior to the lithosphere via magmatism involving heat release or absorption by melting, crystallization, and open-system reactions. It is important to know where magmas are generated and crystallized during its ascent to the earth's surface in the continental region in order to evaluate the role of magmatism in heat transfer through the sub-continental LAB. If a magma generated in the asthenosphere releases heat directly on the earth's surface ending as volcanic eruption and intrusion, then heat loss via magmatism is at maximum efficiency (Ogawa, 1988). Contrary to this, if the magma releases heat within the lithosphere or crust by freezing all the melt there, it heat up the host layer. In this case, the enhancement of heat loss via magmatism depends on the depth of magma freezing, though it is higher than exclusively conductive heat transfer.

In order to examine heat transfer near the sub-continental LAB, it is important to scrutinize the thermal state and its temporal and spatial variability of the mantle material near the LAB and concomitant magma formation and its subsequent magmatism. Fortunately, we have many samples from the continental lithosphere as mantle xenoliths, though xenoliths from the asthenosphere are limited. The continental lithospheric mantle has long history of its formation and modification, but we can extract not only thermal records when xenoliths were entrapped by erupted magmas (mantle geotherm) but also their temporal change before the entrapment by carefully looking at reaction processes took place responding to various thermal and chemical changes taking place in the vicinity of the LAB.

Keywords: asthenosphere, lithosphere, thermal event, mantle xenolith, mineral zoning