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The protection of cultural heritage in crisis. A case study of Beijing.

Public talk by Prof. Dr. SU Rongyu,
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China has a rich cultural heritage, which, however, always has been in a state of crisis. Later cultures in many cases are built and thrive on the destroyed remnants of former cultural layers. Each increase of the population is accompanied by a boom in the erection of buildings, which in many cases results in the destruction of the cultural heritage of former periods. The population growth and the building boom of the second half of the 20th century and the accompanying societal transformations have resulted in an unprecedented crisis for the protection of cultural heritage in China.

In respect to the buried cultural heritage, we can observe that government organized robbing of tombs in China started as early as 1000 B.C. It has reached an unprecedented scale since the 1980s. During the last 40 years not only Chinese ancient tombs have suffered from destruction but this also extends to the architectural heritage, including religious sculptures and artistic artefacts, houses etc. To some extent the threat to the cultural heritage is increasingly determined by its market value. It is this "tradition" of Chinese governments and the people from which the threat to the cultural heritage originates. Beijing, as one of the most important capital cities of ancient China, in many respects constitutes a representative case.

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