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Wood Identification of Ancient Buildings in China and in the Tibetan Cultural Realm

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Related Mission: Mission 1

The study of ancient wooden cultural relics based on wood identification in Japan looks back on an over 60 year-old history. Regarding ancient wooden relics in China and Tibet, however, we only have few such data. This lecture will present the results of wood identifications of ancient buildings, temples and vernacular structures in China, and in the Tibetan Cultural realm, followed by comments on the evolution of wood usage during the ages, and on sensitivity of craftmen to its technical, symbolic and religious properties. The wood identifications were carried out in cooperation with the Tibet Heritage Fund, an NGO which is committed to the preservation and restauration of the Tibetan Cultural Heritage.

Mechtild MERTZ, East Asian art historian, ethnobotanist, and wood anatomist is specialized in the study of the wood species of Japan and China which she studied for over ten years at RISH, Nanjing Forestry University, and at the Research Institute for Humanity and Nature (Kyoto). She published numerous essays on wood identification applied to Japanese and Chinese Buddhist sculpture for European and US American museums, notably the Metropolitan Museum of Art (*Wisdom Embodied – Chinese Buddhist and Daoist Sculpture,* 2010), and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington (*The Study of Buddhist Sculptures from Japan and China Based on Wood Identification*, 2007). Associate member of the CRCAO (Far East Civilisations Research Institute, Paris) she continues her research in Japan and China, in a scientific approach (wood identification) at the service of human sciences, and published *Wood and Traditional Woodworking in Japan* (Ōtsu, 2011).