

Journey to the East

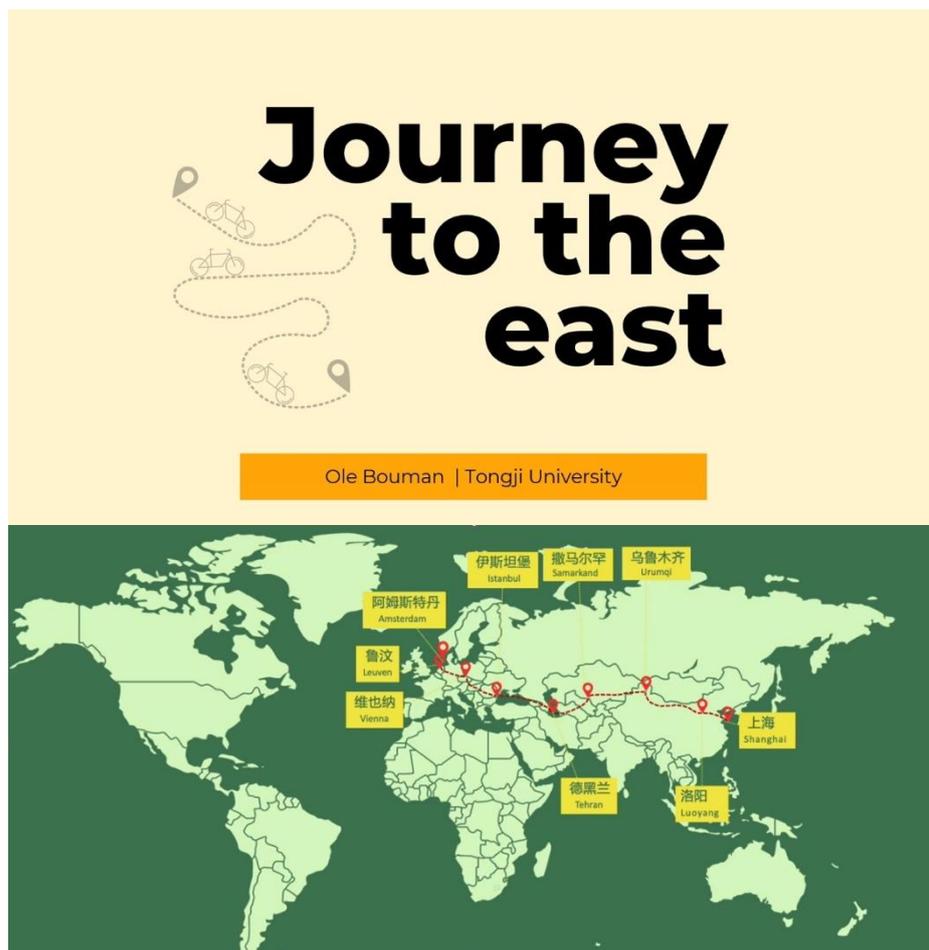
Keywords: East/West Relationship, expanded architecture, architecture of peace, architecture as a reality check, state of the planet, journey as research, social connections, Reverse Curation, Belt & Road, Silk Road, Cycling challenge, field trip, slow truth

Teachers in Charge: Pr. Ole Bouman, Chao Weng

Enrolled Students: 6-8 (including international students)

Time: To be determined (due to the nature of this studio, frequent improvisations will be natural) **Begins: February, 2024**

Venue: Online Tencent Meeting



Tentative Route

Overview:

- 1. The Journey of Architecture**
- 2. The Architecture of a Journey**
- 3. An Expedition through and by Architecture**

This is a 15,000 km bike tour from Amsterdam to Shanghai between February and July 2024. Instead of a straight line from the starting point to the ending destination, this journey touches upon different scales. Similar to regular architecture breaking down into smaller tasks, such as the structural system, functional arrangement, material utilization, etc., to create an interesting spatial organization. This journal is constituted by 10 events, 150+ stages, and 1500+ moments. By creating, recording, researching, preempting, explaining, and exhibiting, it refines your understanding of architecture along the Silk Road in terms of the East and West connection and builds up the scope of knowledge by directly facing reality.

Motivation:

• Peaceful Tour: Architecture Silk Road

Ten years after the Belt and Road Initiative (一带一路) was put forward, the connection between East and West cannot just be a matter of economic collaboration but also cultural communication. Architecture here can act as a primary lens and medium of understanding and measure the crossing of boundaries between languages, customs, religions, historical scars, world systems, and fashions. This Architecture Silk Road, along different conceptions of 想法、看法、办法、说法、做法, could help build up mutual understanding of different cultures and fostering collaboration.

• Reality Tour: Bicycle Trip to Experience Reality

Increasingly, we can speak of a crisis in our sense of reality. Not only do we live in a culture of ubiquitous computing and recently a major breakthrough of AI, but also can we observe a gap between talking, intending, planning, proposing, and such on the one hand, and actually doing on the other. There is a tendency to move away from reality, consequential action, real needs, and real situations. This journey will be exemplary to go for this reality. When you do the journey on a bicycle, you have to face undeniably daily realities: the reality of climate condition, terrain influence, encounters with real people, and other unexpected situations. A journey by bicycle also provides a slow enough pace to perceive, digest, and accept realities on the ground.

Objectives:

- Through this research studio, students will discover alternative possibilities for exploring the world, learn to identify local and material clues for design, and obtain knowledge about architecture as the medium for human aspirations to achieve a more sustainable and peaceful existence.
- Students will enhance their ability to think and conceptualize holistically by following, interpreting, interjecting, projecting, reconceiving an extended architectural route, witnessing, participating, and interacting in online activities and discussions, and synthesizing their personal trajectory in a final statement.

The Tentative Program:

- **10 Debates on tour, fostering academic discourse**

Ten events will be set in different cities, where local persons and universities will be available to join the academic debate. Each event represents the edgeless and timeless connection between East and West, manifesting itself in culture, and particularly in architecture. We highlight different aspects of the event. With the holding of each event, the East and West dialogue is zoomed in. These 10 events might take place in:

- 1) Waterloo: the location where the Battle of Waterloo took place, which manifested Napoleon's defeat, that is, the western failure in conquering the east (Egypt, Moscow).
- 2) Vienna: Muslims attacked three times on Europe with the aim of conquering Vienna and expanding westward. Vienna is also the border of European Christian civilization.
- 3) Istanbul: marks the end of the European continent and the beginning of the Asian continent, making it a strong geographical symbol.
- 4) Eastern Turkey: is located at the boundary where the Asian and European geological plates meet, resulting in frequent earthquakes and significant geological activity at a planetary level.
- 5) Tehran: unbelievable richness makes it unwise to reject eastern culture; it may offer more than any western culture.
- 6) Samarkand: as the main station and midpoint on the Silk Road for many centuries, served as a crucial meeting point where East and West converged.
- 7) Urumqi: is an important hub along the Silk Road. It served as a pivotal point for trade between the East and the West, connecting the inland regions of China with Central and West Asia.
- 8) Dunhuang: a hub on the eastern section of the Silk Road for both commercial trade and cultural exchange. The Mogao Caves, which preserve a rich legacy of Buddhist art and culture, serve as one of the important centers for artistic exchange along the Silk Road
- 9) Lanzhou: the city's strategic location at the confluence of the Yellow River and several major trading routes made it a key center for the movement of goods, ideas, and people during the ancient Silk Road era.

10) Luoyang: eastern terminus of the ancient Silk Road. Goods, including silk, porcelain, and tea, made their way from other parts of China to Luoyang before being transported further west.

11) Suzhou: garden culture

12) Shanghai: Review in Tongji

• **150 stages, coping with the daily challenge in changing landscapes**

In between those 10 events, 7 discussions will be given from the road, where we both discuss what happened last week, as well as what might happen in the next week. Students will be tasked with defining the trajectory and finding interesting clues or details that can help me detect meaning along the way kilometer by kilometer.

• **1500 + moments on tour, observing, interpreting, connecting with people and the planet**

Everyday photo shoots for perception and interpretation of similar shifts. Collect seeds and threads from the wealth of cultures which will be used in final exhibitions. Sharing experiences of crossing the boundaries between languages, customs, religions, historical scars, world systems, and as yet unknown domains.

Creative Agenda:

1. An Act of Reverse Curation
2. Architecture as social fabric: pursuing a new silk for the 21st century
3. Finding new paths for sustainable and lasting connections
4. Interacting with the realities of the planet, nature and people
5. Collecting seeds and threads from the wealth of cultures
6. Sharing experiences of crossing the boundaries between languages, customs, religions, historical scars, world systems, and as yet unknown domains
7. Designing changes and reality checks

Project structure:

- Opening event to discuss the research agenda at KU Leuven
- Five Months on the Road ca. 15 academic events with local partners, discussing
- Shifting architectural cultures across Eur-Asia, to be followed online by Tongji research studio participants to research, develop and reflect
- Each event yields an exemplary item of local design culture, coming together in a mobile collection
- Everyday photo shoots for perception and interpretation of similar shifts
- Final review at Tongji
- Publications

Course Layouts:

17 online sharing sessions will be held, allowing students to follow in-depth the itinerary of their professor as a field trip in motion.

- Session will take an average of 2 hours, timing weekly to be decided
- 2 hours preparation each week • total 4 hours per week

Outcomes:

- In the concluding weeks of the semester, students will be assigned to design an installation to embody the insights and collected items.
- All events contribute to building a legacy of architectural connections between Tongji and local Asian (architectural) organizations and individuals

Ongoing research question :

1. What does architecture mean with respect to the Silk Road as a road for peace, connection, and respect for nature?
2. What does a local situation contribute to this awareness?
3. What did the passing of every 1000 km do to this awareness?
4. What item can be made/collected on the way to take to Shanghai as part of the final showcase?
5. What difference does every 1000 km make to architecture discourse?

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