

ISS09 – Barbara Schey

This was the 6th International Shibori Symposium I have attended and each one has been very rewarding in its own way. It is wonderful to catch up with friends from all over the world and meet new friends and put faces to others.

I chose to travel on 4 different tours with members of the network and this was also a chance to connect more closely with other WSN members. I arrived in Shanghai a day early and was fortunate to have a day with Barbara Rogers and Sylvia Riley, travelling on trains, which I never would have done by myself, and visiting Nankeen Blue Printing Gallery and another train on to high fashion area.



TOUR 1: The following day a small group, which included world famous Carter Smith, seen on left with Deb Donnelly from New Zealand, we left on a 5 night tour to Hangzhou where the Symposium was to be held. Our first stop (for 3 nights) was at Jin Ze Arts Centre about 1 hour from Shanghai. This wonderful place is under the management of Edith Cheung, who is also attached to the Polytechnic at Hong Kong and divides her time between the two places. She

has a delightful personality and treated us to all sorts of experiences which included a boat ride down the canal, walk through local village, demonstration of sand mandala, explanation of tea ceremony, viewing of precious textile archives etc. We also participated in a choice of mini workshops in Miao embroidery, braids, or bag assembly – it was good to see the men participating in embroidery and bag assembly. The bags were made from handwoven textile which had been stored since before the Cultural Revolution. Another highlight was a one day tour to Blue and White paste resist studio at Nantong where I was able to get some good video of the process. Mascha Mioni, Hiroko Watanabe, Ana Lisa Hedstrom were also among the luminaries

On the final day we departed for Hangzhou via Museums in Suzhou which is a small town of 3-4 million people. (Shanghai has 24 million).

I understand Sylvia Riley is to write about the Symposium so I will concentrate on the tours, however I was very thrilled to have my article on Thread and Dorset buttons accepted for a poster and 7 pages of my research were published in the Symposium handouts.

TOUR 2: This commenced with a short sightseeing tour of Hangzhou and then on to Wenzhou for 2 nights after a 5 hour road trip. Here we visited the local herb market in the morning, then climbed up the side of an incredible and picturesque mountain (in a coach of course) for lunch and then down part the way to a Clamp Resist Studio where we were given a wonderful demonstration on the process involved and then onto an indigo farm. The next morning we returned to Hangzhou ready to go on a bus to the airport to commence Tour 3.



TOUR 3: This was the start of the Silk Road Tours. 23 of us flew from Hangzhou to Urumqi where we arrived late at night ready for our usual early start in the morning. Yoshiko's tours are amazing but not for the faint hearted! Here we visited the Uygur Museum and Xianjiang Institute of Relics and after a late lunch, we went to the Grand Bazaar. Only one night in Kashgar (which is about as far west as one can go in China) but we managed to fit in Abakh Khoja's Tomb, Id Kah Grand Mosque and tour the old town.

The whole of China is on "Beijing time" so the further west one goes, the longer it stays dark in the morning, this is why when we visited the Sunday Animal market at 9.30 am the sun was just coming up and people were still arriving with their, cattle, sheep, camels and fruit and vegetables. We are now in the Taklamakan Desert and it is very cold. Sometimes when we leave in the morning



it is minus 2-4 degree centigrade. It was fascinating to see so much snow in the desert. The whole of the Silk Road area are mainly Muslims and as the Chinese just love neon signs and Arabic writing travels in one direction and Chinese in the other, these were fascinating to watch.

After the market, we left for Hotan driving through the desert and visiting local Uyghur people on the way. Pomegranets are grown everywhere and there are lots of stalls piled with these and pomegranet juice along the way. This is where we first started to experience “umbrella toilets”! Public toilets are non existent in the desert so we were warned to take umbrellas and be prepared to squat behind them in the desert. I did not take any pics but it would have been interesting!

At Hotan we were fortunate to be welcomed into felt carpet makers, visit a bazaar and artisans centre. The next day was our longest, DEPARTING hotel at 6 am with breakfast on the coach and travelling across dessert for 1200km, all with the one driver! It was a long day but once again, fascinating the see the snow on the desert and people “planting” straw on the sides of the road to prevent sand blowing onto road. The desert was not nice and yellow like one sees in travel advertisements but a dirty grey brown. There was not a palm tree in sight. The last part of the trip was very scary as the driver was tired, we were climbing into the mountains and there were lots of coal trucks which travel at night to avoid police inspection for overloading. We arrived at 10 pm for late dinner and no hot showers until morning where once again we had to leave at 9am (after breakfast this time). It was a short drive to Buddha Caves at Kizil for the first of our wonderful cave visits, then on



to Turpan for 2 nights. This was a very interesting

area with visits to Museums, including the Karez Irrigation system, ancient ruins and on to an evening sleeper train to Dunhuang and the Gobi Desert.



Waiting for the train was quite an experience, the locals had everything from live animals to enormous parcels.

This seems to long so I think I shall save tour 4 for the next newsletter. This whole experience has had a profound effect on me with the amazing landscape, the wonderful museums full of textiles which at up to 4,000 years old and the friendly people. My fellow travellers had amazing knowledge about the culture and everyone was interactive and friendly. The hotels were OK with good bathrooms but I do not think they have discovered vacuum cleaners yet, never mind the beds were clean!

To be continued.....