

# FEMMES DU NINGXIA

## Objectives

- Reconnaissance trip
- Spotting items in the fabrics market of Yinchuan
- Setting up the computer offered by Alliance Française of Beijing
- Presentation of 2010 objectives to the Flowers and reminder about the commitments made by FDN
- Trial of a small standard order to observe the process
- Taking pictures for the “Baihua” website to come.



## Participating in the mission:

**Flore Coppin** – Femmes du Ningxia Beijing coordinator

**Hélène Duvigneau** – journalist

**Sophie Calvarin** – photographer

## December mission report

by Flore Coppin

**Day 1- 12.23.2009**

**Beijing-Yinchuan trip**

Departure from Beijing airport to Yinchuan at 9:00 p.m.

Upon arrival in Yinchuan, freezing cold is paralyzing the city so that it is difficult for us to find a taxi. We have an appointment with Shi Mei in a downtown hotel. She came to Yinchuan in the morning to look for fabrics markets in town. It is the second time I meet with Shi Mei and we are both pleased to see each other again. After short talks, we go and rest because our program for the next day is very busy.





Ancient embroidered pillows, scissors and stove...)



## Day 2- 12.24.2009 Yinchuan-Yuwang

In the morning, we go to the Ningxia provincial museum. This huge museum was inaugurated recently, for the 50th anniversary of the founding of the autonomous province of Ningxia. The visit is free like it is now in most of Chinese museums. Scenography is modern, but we however notice that the collections are fairly poor. It illustrates the lack of resources for the provincial policy of heritage preservation, and it is an indecent contrast with the gigantic scale of the building's architecture. We identify a few embroidered articles, mostly soles, ear-covers, bags, purses, hats or belts. We also find a few representations of religious calligraphies embroidered with plain knitting.

After the visit of the museum, we go back downtown to visit the two fabrics markets that Shi Mei found on the previous day. The first one looks more like a bazaar and presents mostly furnishing fabric and household linen. However we manage to find strings that the Flowers use to make traditional Chinese bows. Shi Mei buys a few meters of them for the cooperative. We then go to the second market, which on the other hand is a large true fabrics market! Many stalls present fabrics which are convenient for the cooperative's needs. It is thus possible for the Flowers to buy their fabric in Yinchuan. I take this opportunity to buy a few meters of cloth and lining in the name of Femmes du Ningxia and offer it to Baihua.

The price of fabrics is very attractive: cotton cloth for 10 to 15 yuans per meter; lining for 5 to 7 yuans per meter. In addition, according to Shi Mei, some of the fabrics we selected may as well be bought in Yuwang's weekly market. This option would reduce the buying cost of fabric for the cooperative, and thus the price of the products of the current collection.

Time goes fast on the market and we are already very late to catch the bus departing for Yuwang at 2:30 p.m...

After 4 hours drive in the cold (the bus is not heated and temperature does not go above 0° on board...), we finally reach Yuwang. Shi Mei goes back home in Zhangjiayuan. Our hotel hosts are very friendly, which we are delighted about on this December 24th far away from our families.. Shortly after arrival, a policeman requests that we go to the police station to register ourselves and to copy our passports. We will spend 45 minutes there, because the journalist visa of H el ene is arousing curiosity of police officers and we have to go through a complete questioning: what are we doing in Yuwang, who do we come to meet, how long do we stay? We are also requested not to take pictures of the town... Please

go, there is nothing to see in Yuwang! We are seething, but Christmas is inspiring us the choice of a cordial cooperation with our examiners.

***"If we can guarantee the members of the cooperative get a 600 RMB salary each month, the women will not leave to work in the cities. They prefer earning 600 RMB and staying home, rather than earning 1200 RMB working in the city."***

Shi Mei

### **Day 3- 12.25.2009** **Yuwang-Liumiao**

In the morning, hotel meeting at 10:00 a.m. with Ma Xiaohua and Ding Ting. Departure for the workshop where 10 Flowers are waiting for us. I organize a small meeting to introduce myself, summarize 2009 activities, and present the program and 2010 commitments of Femmes du Ningxia. The Flowers are pleased with the planned program of 2010. Most of them are expecting a lot from Wen Fang's coming to the workshop in March for an artistic project. At the end of the meeting, we all go for lunch in a restaurant, lunch is paid for by Femmes du Ningxia.



Carrying the computer offered by Alliance Fran aise, and





In the afternoon, we go back to the workshop where we set up the computer offered by Alliance Française of Beijing. Ding Ting is appointed in charge of the computer. The Flowers receive a basic training for the computer. In order to test the process, I place a small order with the Flowers, then I ask them to create new products with the fabrics bought in Yinchuan on the previous day. This order enables me to see how the Flowers proceed and to identify organization problems; the result is positive, but improvements are to be made on the following points: inventory management (calculating thread and fabric need for each product), sharing work (respect each one's role in the cooperative), human resources (improve the system for work allocation and create process models). With this objective, I ask the Flowers to give me measures for thread and fabric of each product of the order... to gain autonomy, the Flowers need to learn how to define precisely the cost price of each product.

At the end of the afternoon, the Flowers organized a small tea break for Christmas: we eat sunflower seeds and sweets around the stove whereas Shi Mei reads for us the report of the trip she made to Beijing in November with Ma Xiaohua and Cao Fanglan. Before the night falls, we rent a small bus and go back to Liumiao with the Flowers. We spend the night at Ma Xiaohua's place.

## CONCLUSION

The actions and discussions held with the women during the trip confirm the validity of 2010 action plan of Femmes du Ningxia and remind us the priorities:

- Find commercial outlets and assist in client follow-up to guarantee stability and durability of order books, a sine qua non condition for women members of the cooperative to be able to stay in the villages and have a decent life...
- Improve product lines with the help of a designer...
- Improve the cooperative's management, with regards to inventory management and accounts
- Help the Flowers to open themselves to the outside world, to understand better the market and better communicate with the creation of a website.

### Day 4- 12.26.2009 Yuwang-Liumiao

In the morning, I organize a meeting at Ma Xiaohua's place with 11 Flowers who could not come to Yuwang on the previous day. Then, we spend almost 2 hours with Ding Ting in order to update the list of active members of the Cooperative. A list of 31 members is established. In the afternoon, we go to Chen Yuping's house (a member). Her mother in law owns a few embroideries dating back to her youth. After enquiry with the Flowers met these last two days, it seems difficult to find ancient embroideries in the villages (Femmes du Ningxia wanted to collect ancient embroideries to identify designs). We then go to Cao Fenglan's place, to look at the accounts of the Cooperative. For our last evening, the kids of Ma Xiaohua prepared a dancing and singing show, the mood is festive tonight in Liumiao!

### Day 5- 12.27.2009 Liumiao-Beijing

We leave Liumiao at 7:00 a.m. and reach Beijing in the evening, at 6:00 p.m.