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### Fashioning the Curator: The Chinese at the Lambing Flat Folk Museum

Sharon Margaret Peoples

#### Introduction

In March 2015, I visited the Lambing Flat Folk Museum (established 1967) in the "cherry capital of Australia", the town of Young, New South Wales, in preparation for a student excursion. Like other Australian folk museums, this museum focuses on the ordinary and the everyday of rural life, and is heavily reliant on local history, local historians, volunteers, and donated objects for the collection.

It may not sound as though the Lambing Flat Folk Museum (LFFM) holds much potential for a fashion curator, as fashion exhibitions have become high points of innovation in exhibition design. It is quite a jolt to return to old style folk museums, when travelling shows such as *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* (Metropolitan Museum of Art 2011 – V&A Museum 2015) or *The Fashion World of Jean Paul Gaultier* (V&A Museum 2011 – NGV 2014) are popping up around the globe. The contrast stimulated this author to think on the role and the power of curators. This paper will show that the potential for fashion as a vehicle for demonstrating ideas other than through rubrics of design or history has been growing. We all wear dress. We express identity, politics, status, age, gender, social values, and mental state through the way we dress each and every day. These key issues are also explored in many museum exhibitions.

Small museums often have an abundance of clothing. For them, it is a case of not only managing and caring for growing collections but also curating objects in a way that communicates regional and often national identity, as well as narrating stories in meaningful ways to audiences. This paper argues that the way in which dress is curated can greatly enhance temporary and permanent exhibitions. Fashion curation is on the rise (Riegels Melchior). This paper looks at why this is so, the potential for this specialisation in curation, the research required, and the sensitivity needed in communicating ideas in exhibitions. It also suggests how fashion curation skills may facilitate an increasing demand.

#### Caring for the Audience

The paper draws on a case study of how Chinese people at the LFFM are portrayed. The Chinese came to the Young district during the 1860s gold rush. While many people often think the Chinese were sojourners (Rolls), that is, they found gold and returned to China, many actually settled in regional Australia (McGowan; Couchman; Frost). At Young there were riots against the Chinese miners, and this narrative is illustrated at the museum.

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