

## **JOURNEYS FROM CHINA TO NEVADA: THREE CHINESE COSTUMES**

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### **Abstract:**

**The Nevada State Museum's costume collection includes numerous artifacts related to Chinese culture. This report describes three costumes: a lightweight blue robe from The Hattie May Brown Collection, a fur-lined coat from The Wallace J. Tun Family Collection, and a red wedding ensemble from The Mrs. Trevor S. Shaw, Jr. Collection.**

### **Contents:**

**Nevada State Museum's Marjorie A. Russell Clothing and Textile Research Center, Carson City, Nevada; The Hattie May Brown Collection; The Wallace J. Tun Family Collection; The Mrs. Trevor S. Shaw, Jr. Collection; "Beyond Gum San [Golden Mountain]: A History of the Chinese in Nevada."**

### **Introduction**

It is my pleasure to bring you greetings from our colleague Jan Loverin, Curator of Clothing and Textiles, Nevada State Museum, USA. We have enjoyed working together to bring this report to you. Jan works in Carson City, Nevada; I live in Phoenix, Arizona, south and east of Carson City.

The Marjorie A. Russell Clothing and Textile Research Center was established in 1992 as part of the Nevada State Museum. The Center's staff members and volunteers are responsible for the care of several state-owned costume collections: Nevada Historical Society; Nevada State Museum; Nevada State Railroad Museum; and the University of Nevada-Reno, School of Home Economics. In this setting, costumes and textiles are processed, photographed, prepared for exhibitions, and stored.

We selected these three Chinese costumes to share with you today:

- a. a lightweight blue robe,
- b. a fur-lined coat, and
- c. a red wedding ensemble.



Figure 1: Three Chinese costumes, Nevada State Museum Collection.

### The Hattie May Brown Collection

Miss Hattie May Brown was a remarkable woman for her time. Born in Nebraska in 1889, she graduated from the University of Nebraska around 1910 with majors in Latin and German. For about ten years after graduation she taught school in Nebraska, Idaho, Washington, and Montana. Around 1920, she secured a teaching position in China where she taught English in a boys' school for three years. After her tour of duty in China, Miss Hattie taught English in girls' schools in India and Syria. She then traveled extensively in Europe. She returned to Nevada in 1928 and continued her career teaching Latin, English, French, and Spanish at Churchill County High School. Miss Hattie died in 1977 at the age of 87. She was remembered as a "well loved and respected teacher." [Hattie May Brown obituary, NSM accession file, and clipping file]

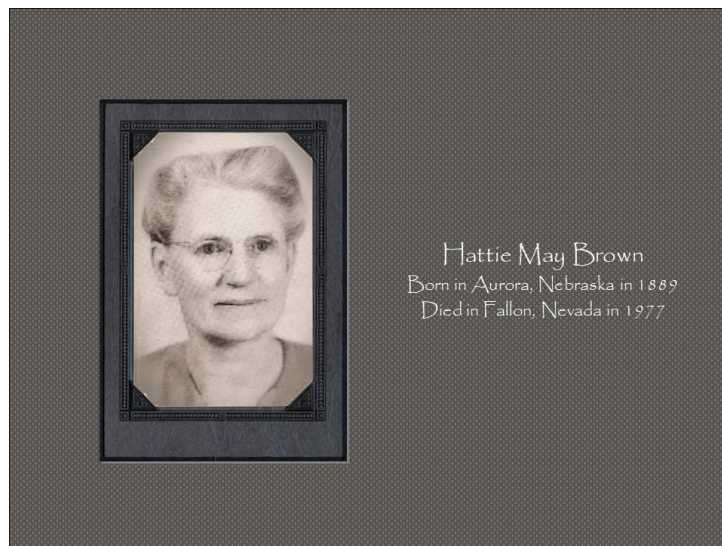


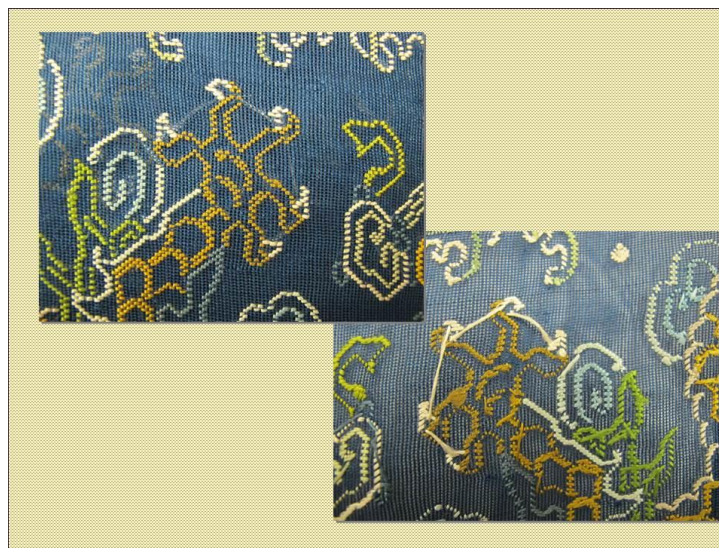
Figure 2: Miss Hattie May Brown (1889 – 1977).

In 1953 Miss Hattie donated her collection of mementoes from her stay in China, including this blue nine-dragon robe. Other Chinese objects in her donation included a mah jong set, writing set, silk sashes, and embroidered slippers. [NSM accession file]



*Figure 3:* Dragon robe donated by Miss Hattie May Brown.

The robe is embroidered with nine dragons, each with five-clawed feet. These details show the same foot as seen on the right side and the underside of the fabric.



*Figure 4:* Dragon robe details.

The sleeve extensions terminate with classic cuffs and the garment closes with five openwork metal spheres. The transparent gauze weave provides the background for motifs of clouds, waves, bats, knots, mountains, and vases.



*Figure 5: Sleeve cuff, metal closure, and gauze details.*

Thanks to Miss Hattie's adventurous nature, the robe and her other mementoes from China are part of the Nevada State Museum's costume collection.

### **The Wallace J. Tun Family Collection**

The Wallace J. Tun family arrived in Nevada in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. They owned and operated the New Star Club, a Reno gambling business licensed from 1932 to 1944. The New Star Club "was a popular spot that catered mostly to Asian and African American customers." [NSM clipping file] This blue fur-lined coat was part of the Tun Collection donated in 1993. [NSM accession file]



*Figure 6: Fur-lined coat donated by Wallace J. Tun.*

Our colleagues at the University of Nevada and Arizona State University translated this label to read “Daxin Company Department Store.” Are you able to help us refine this interpretation?



*Figure 7:* Label of fur coat.

The coat's collar is lined with an unidentified fur which resembles canine fur. The body and sleeves are fully lined with curly lamb, fur identification provided to us by a Reno furrier. Your help in more exact fur identification is most appreciated.



*Figure 8:* Collar and lining fur details.

In addition to the warm and functional coat, the Tun Collection includes gaming equipment from the New Star Club as well as two silk dresses.

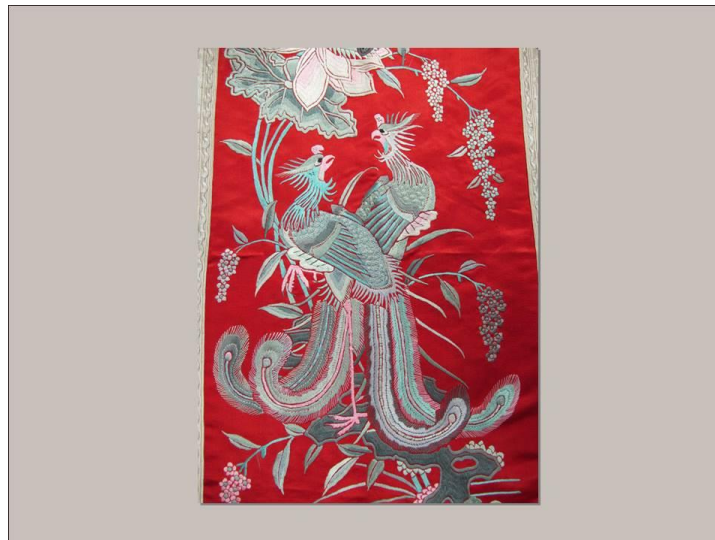
## The Mrs. Trevor S. Shaw, Jr. Collection

This ensemble is a donation about which we know very little. It was donated by Mrs. Trevor S. Shaw, Jr. in 1981. The Deed of Gift describes the outfit as a “Chinese wedding costume purchased in Tientsin [Tianjin], China, circa 1930.” [NSM accession file] Our efforts to contact the Shaw family have been unsuccessful.



*Figure 9:* Wedding ensemble donated by Mrs. Trevor S. Shaw, Jr.

While the unlined trousers are unadorned, the jacket and skirt are embroidered with flowers and pairs of phoenix birds.



*Figure 10:* Details of flowers and birds.

We found several unknown marks on the interior of the garments. Could they possibly be dressmaker's marks?

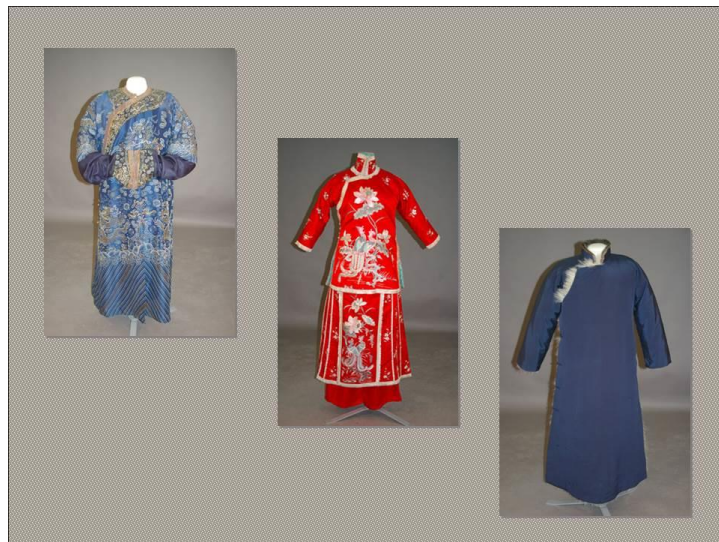


*Figure 11: Interior marks.*

Your insights into this wedding ensemble are most welcome. Our colleague Sue Fawn Chung, University of Nevada—Las Vegas, speculates that “it could have been worn in Nevada for ceremonial occasions, as this was a popular tradition.” [Personal conversation between Loverin and Chung]

### **Conclusion**

The Nevada State Museum is honored to preserve these Chinese garments in the Marjorie A. Russell Clothing and Textile Research Center. Thank you for your attention to their stories. We look forward to receiving your help with our translation of the label and identification of the furs.



*Figure 12: Three Chinese costumes, Nevada State Museum Collection.*

In 1993 the Nevada State Museum in Carson City presented the exhibition “Beyond Gum San [Golden Mountain]: A History of the Chinese in Nevada.” Many of the museum’s Chinese artifacts were exhibited, including Mr. Tun’s fur-lined coat, although we could not locate a usable photograph of that specific exhibit case. [NSM exhibition files]

We extend our appreciation to these generous colleagues for their assistance: Rebecca Akins, Museum Consultant; William H. Akins, III, Consultant; William Asmar, William Furs; Roger Berger, Computer Consultant; Ines Brooks-Myers, Oakland Museum of California; Sue Fawn Chung, University of Nevada—Las Vegas; Mary Corkill; Shelly Foote, Museum Consultant; Mary Ellen Klette; Hope Williams, Nevada State Library and Archives; Martha Wilson, Graphic Designer; and Haiyan Wang, Arizona State University. Note that Rebecca Akins and Inez Brooks-Myers are members of our ICOM Costume Committee. Thank you.

**Photographs courtesy of the Nevada State Museum**