

# Study on Huipile, Guatemalan Folk Costume, in the British Museum

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## I. Introduction

Textile exists in our daily life. As a tool of playing a cultural role, it shows off its distinctive beauty. For the Guatemalans, textile is more than just industrial art products. It is a symbol of their long history and culture.

Most South-America countries are located in an upland. Due to big temperature difference between morning and evening, the weather becomes cold after sunset. People wear their traditional cloak in the evening. It's also used as decoration such as shawl, hat, knee cover, blanket, sofa ornament.

This paper is to find out the features of Huipile, examining its type, symbol, and structure in terms of local region

## II. Type and Pattern of Huipil

### 1. Type

Huipil is made of 1-3 panels. Composed of a single textile, it's usually boat-neck styled. The flank is sewn with a big hole on each side left for arms. The cloth is sewn considering its decorative style. In case two long rectangular textiles are woven, a hole is left in the center area for head. When three panels are used, the hole in the center area is cut as round or square style.

Distinctive features are shown in each region. In Quezaltenango, big Huipil which is usually used as veil is used. In San cristobal totonicapàn, neck-decorated (called, "gola") Huipil is used. In Chichicastenango, the Huipil which is cross-shaped when it is unrolled and sunlight-symbolized on around the neck part has been worn. In some regions, a narrow tape (called, "randa") is used to decorate the joint parts.

### 2 Pattern

Due to its gorgeous and distinctive color and pattern, each tribe can be distinguished only

by the color or pattern of Guatemalan Huipil. The stripe pattern is the most widely used. Then, other geometric patterns including triangle and diamond are used. San Antonio Aguas Calientes is well known with quetzal flower pattern on luxury flower pattern while the more traditional chichicastenango is famous for sunshine-symbolized pattern with square-shaped neck. Zunil is made dyeing 3~21 colors on the cloth vertically. Santa Catarina Palopó, on the other hand, is well known with simple human or animal-symbolized pattern on red or white background.

The distinctive patterns are as follows: puppet pattern in Tonicapán, side view of two birds which are facing each other in Nebaj, half human and half jaguar pattern in Nahualá, symmetrical peacock in Antigua, Kapok pattern in San Pedro Sacatepequez.

### 3 Structure

Guatemalan textiles are woven with extra-wefts method. There are several kinds of patterns including the extra-wefts method.

Slant-striped pattern is shown in the textile with inclined surface. The strip pattern is usually expressed using the complementary color. In slant-striped pattern, when the odd slant color and the even slant color are same, the pattern is not distinguishable. However, when the colors are different (ex: the odd slant pattern is white and the even slant pattern is black), it's shown as long-striped pattern. The slant-striped pattern is popular with a certain coloring in some reasons. Around Todos Santos Cuchumatán and Huehuetenango, for example, white and red coloring is famous.

### 4. Materials

As materials of Guatemalan textile, unsynthetic materials such as cotton, wool, and silk were mostly used in the past. In 20C when commercial textile was introduced, however, the dyed materials started substituting for the natural materials. Many cotton textiles have been found, which vindicates that they were the most widely used. Because each textile keeps its distinctiveness, it can be estimated from which it's originated.

As Guatemalan commercial cottons, there are single thread, double-ply thread, and triple-ply thread. The double-ply thread is less shrinkable due to special process. The triple-ply thread is stronger than the double-ply thread so that it has been used to make solid and strong products such as belt or hair band.

## III. Features of Guatemalan Huipil

Even though the Guatemalan Huipil is similar with other South-American countries' Huipils, it differs as follows (in terms of pattern and color, structure and decoration, and materials):

First, the origin of Guatemalan Huipil dates back to around A.D. 300.

Second, the Guatemalan Huipil changed a lot, going through the Spanish colony. The female costume kept its traditional pattern while the male one changed to shirts and jacket. The Ikat

method also emerged. Furthermore, in many regions, the costumes were ornamented with satin, running, and cross stitches.

Third, the Guatemalan Huipil is classified into several kinds based on its use; daily life, certain formal meeting, wedding ceremony. Mostly, 1-3 panels are used, and various shapes are shown such as round-, square-, T-, and I- necked shapes.

All the Guatemalan Huipils have shown a unique feature since the late 19C. Its width is twice larger than its height, and the flanks are sewn.

Fourth, its colors and patterns are gorgeous and unique based on Maya myth. Each region keeps its distinctiveness. The bottom part which is patched under the skirt is white solid pattern, which seems much practical. Red and white are usually used, and red color is mostly used for the central panel. There are unique patterns; tree of life, Kapok, puppet, etc.

Fifth, in Guatemala textiles, there are weaving striped pattern, slant striped pattern, slant float, wrap textile, synthetic textile, etc. A certain pattern and colorings are famous in each region respectively. Brocading method is the most widely used.

Lastly, in terms of materials, animal and vegetable materials are used. Cotton and wool are widely used. Due to its commercialization, commercial cottons or acrylic wools are also used frequently.

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