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(RE)SITUATING CEREMONIAL TEXTILES IN IFUGAO, UPLAND PHILIPPINES

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Introduction

Theories of macroeconomic development argue that as communities become integrated into a world-market economy, indigenous customs are increasingly threatened. This assumes that forces such as Western missionary activities and the commercialization of household production inevitably lead to a deterioration of local arts, religion and socio-economic practices. These theories, however, ignore the dynamics of local-level contexts and the agency of individual actors.

Since the early 1900s, the interaction of indigenous religious traditions with external religions like Christianity has created diverse ritual practices throughout the upland Philippines. An important part of the indigenous religion of the Ifugao of northern Luzon, for example, is the belief in and practice of ancestor worship. But the Ifugao are also Catholic and their woven ceremonial textiles figure prominently in both these religious practices. Since the 1950s, the Ifugao have also become increasingly dependent on a cash economy. To earn money they sell local household crafts such as woodcarvings and certain textiles produced for tourists and their labour. In this changing climate, local groups such as the Ifugao desire increased public recognition of their cultural identity and their role in society, yet they also possess national aspirations for material progress and development. These contradictory tendencies, raise many questions. For example, given the continuing challenges of social and economic integration, how can the principles of a market economy and those of Christianity, the religion of the dominant lowland majority, be reworked in ways that uphold unique local worldviews and practices?

This paper, based on my 1994-1995 fieldwork in the northern Philippines, examines the impact of changing economic and social conditions on the production and use of Ifugao ceremonial textiles in the village of Banaue, Ifugao Province. I suggest that the production and use of ritual textiles - women's skirts, men's loincloths and blankets - form a bridge between indigenous and external religious customs such as Catholicism. In fact, they are the medium through which this transformation is articulated. While the patterns in Ifugao ritual cloths continue to reproduce past designs, the contexts within which these textiles function are constantly in flux. In the face of change, Ifugao ceremonial textiles continue to provide a visual statement of an ongoing negotiation and an enduring ethnic identity. This focus on Ifugao ritual textiles adds to the related work on sacred textiles in Southeast Asia by documenting the survival, through redirection and reconfiguration, of this indigenous practice.

In this paper I use the term "ritual" or "ceremonial" textile to identify those cloths which are integral to the successful performance of Ifugao rituals such as rites of passage. Although they may, at times, participate in the secular sphere, textiles designated as "ritual" are primarily used in and associated with the sacred sphere. Secondly, the textiles I refer to as "ritual" cloths are identified as such because of their patterning. As I will outline later, only cloths designed with specific warp stripe arrangements may be used in ritual contexts. Although the category of "ritual" textiles is problematic, I argue for understanding this

¹ The author acknowledges the financial support of this research provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, pre-doctoral fellowship.

designation, not as a static and bounded sphere, but as a category in which modernity is characterized through continuity.

The Setting: Banaue, Ifugao Province

The Ifugao are an ethnolinguistic group of people living on the western side of the Gran Cordillera Central mountain range which extends through the centre of northern Luzon. The term Ifugao identifies the ethnic group of people as well as their province and their language. The municipality of Banaue is comprised of seventeen villages or *barangays*; Amganad, the weaving village in which I conducted my fieldwork, has 260 households. The main economic activity in Banaue, as throughout Ifugao and the Cordillera, is subsistence wet-rice cultivation and raising pigs. With only one rice harvest per year and no agricultural surplus for sale, the production and sale of crafts is the most viable alternative for people to earn cash. While women concentrate on cloth production, men engage in woodcarving.

In Banaue, women of all ages weave, but not all women are weavers. For the most part, weaving is a part-time endeavour to be balanced with household responsibilities, childcare and work in the rice fields. Women learn to weave from their mothers and work individually in their homes on traditional backstrap looms. Weavers use factory-spun materials, mainly cotton, which they purchase from other local weavers who are also yarn sellers. The women who weave ritual textiles may or may not be involved in the larger, parallel production of ikat-patterned textiles targeted for commercial sale to tourists. The weavers producing ritual textiles most often respond to orders placed by their neighbours for specific ceremonial cloths since these textiles are always required for rites of passage such as births, weddings, funerals and curing rites.

Types of Ritual Textiles

This section identifies the types of ritual textiles woven in Banaue. I analyze the way they are designed and what this means to the women who make them and to those who use them. The main types of Ifugao ritual textiles include men's loincloths, women's skirts and blankets.

Men's loincloths in Ifugao are known generally as *wanoh*. Measuring approximately 250 centimetres long by 20 centimetres wide, they are worn wrapped around the waist and between the legs. The man's loincloth distinctive to Banaue is known as *binuhla'n*. The design displays two wide black stripes situated on either side of a central red stripe which is flanked by a series of thin yellow, white and red stripes.

Women's skirts or *tolge*, constructed from two or three rectangular pieces of cloth and measuring in total 140 centimetres long by 75 centimetres wide, are worn wrapped around the waist and secured with a cord or belt. The skirts are divided into three categories of first-, second- and third-class garments: the *pagawa baya'ong*, *baya'ong* and *binnalit* respectively. The *binnalit* or third-class *tolge* displays equal sized blue and white warp stripes with red and blue saw-toothed shaped embroidery stitching setting off the seams and selvages. The design of the *baya'ong* or second-class *tolge* consists of alternating solid red and blue stripes of different widths, interspersed with selected stripes depicting geometric, human and animal motifs (rice mortars, snakes) in blue and white. The *pagawa baya'ong* similarly displays red and blue striped side panels, but adds a central white panel supporting two wide blue stripes. It is further distinguished by the striped end band or *langit* which is sewn to each selvage.

The *gamong* or first-class blanket, 200 centimetres long by 150 centimetres wide, is constructed from four sections: two identical central panels display blue and white stripes overlain with blue supplementary weft patterning at either end; and two matching side panels display solid blue and red stripes alternating with warp-patterned blue and white stripes identical to those of the *baya'ong* blanket and skirt. The *baya'ong* or second-class blanket, approximately the same size as the *gamong* blanket, is also composed of four panels: the side panels are identical to those of the *gamong* blanket while the twin centre panels feature a different arrangement of the blue, red and white stripe elements. Both the *gamong* and *baya'ong* blankets support striped end bands or *langit* at each selvage. The *hapé* or third-class blanket, slightly narrower than the *gamong* and *baya'ong* blankets, is constructed from three panels each displaying a simple central white stripe against a dark blue background.

The Striped Design Format

Throughout Ifugao, as in the other Cordillera provinces, warp stripes comprise the major patterning element of the region's warp-faced cloths. Each locality, such as Banaue, has developed its own distinctive arrangement and colouring of the fields of stripes for women's skirts and men's loincloths particularly, while continuing to share many of the features of the blankets.

What material aspect of these textiles identifies them as Ifugao and determines how they will be used in secular and sacred situations? In my M.A. thesis, *The Textiles of Highland Luzon, Philippines: A Case Study in Material Culture* (1991), I analyzed the striped design format of early twentieth-century textiles from the five Cordillera Provinces.² The examples I studied were drawn from a survey I had conducted of major U. S. and Canadian museum holdings of northern Luzon textiles. For my research in 1995, I took with me to Banaue a variety of photographs of the early Ifugao cloths to use in photo-elicitation. When I showed these photographs to weavers, they immediately recognized each textile type identifying them by name and explaining how the cloth would be used. In some instances, weavers identified a specific artisan in one of the weaving villages who was noted for her skill in weaving either loincloths, blankets or skirts.

In my conversations with weavers about these striped textiles, each repeatedly confirmed that the order and colour of the warp stripes, the primary design feature, must faithfully reproduce past arrangements in order to maintain its distinctive character as an Ifugao cloth from Banaue. Weavers may incorporate synthetic yarns into their weaving, where the colours may not be quite right, but the spatial layout remains constant. When I asked weavers, what would happen if this striped format was not followed, they responded that, "the textile would not be identified as being from this place [Banaue]..with a different design, the cloth could not be used in our *cañao* [rituals]; the weaving would not be suitable to offer as a gift." Juxtaposing examples of early twentieth-century textiles from my earlier research with the contemporary Ifugao ritual textiles I viewed during my recent fieldwork demonstrates a remarkable consistency in the organization of the stripes. These designs defy iconographic classification, but analyzing the patterns by the geometric symmetries

² For a more detailed analysis of Cordillera textile patterning, see B. L. Milgram, *The Textiles of Highland Luzon, Philippines: A Case Study in Material Culture*, Chapter Four, M.A. thesis, York University, 1991.

which repeat them, that is, by the way the parts or stripe fields are arranged in the whole design, suggests an underlying structure to which weavers still adhere.

In both the early twentieth-century and contemporary striped cloths, only horizontal and vertical mirror reflection occur as ordering principles. Mirror reflection divides the surface of the cloth across central horizontal and vertical axes, into a bottom half which is a mirror image of the top and into a right side, the mirror image of the left. All the ritual, striped cloths from Banaue, exhibit mirror reflection around two axes. Biaxial reflection is found in loincloths, skirts and in ceremonial blankets. In addition the centre sections of both types of ceremonial blankets restate this symmetry (Fig. 1).

What then are the implications of biaxial mirror reflection in ritual textile design from Banaue? Exploring the cognitive significance of symmetry in cultural contexts, Washburn and Crowe (1988:19) examined the perceptual process to determine which features of a form are salient in how we process information. Studies established that bilateral symmetry is most important in shaping perception and in facilitating the correct identification of an object even without total analysis of the object (Washburn and Crowe 1988:22). Thus, the persistence of biaxial symmetry in these cloths from Banaue means that striped textiles emerge as a familiar and easily understood information code for the user and for the weaver. Weavers acknowledge, moreover, that the production of striped textiles remains today a process requiring specialized knowledge and that being particularly skilled in this type of weaving still brings prestige to the artisan.

Ritual Textiles as Cultural Performers

We are all architects fashioning from the materials of our lives...a framework that makes experience intelligible (Barnlund 1981:88).

Theoretical approaches in anthropology to the study of ritual objects generally revolve around two basic questions: what do things mean and what use are they (Augé 1982:6)? In Banaue, at the time of my research, no social or religious event was complete without textiles being bestowed, exchanged or buried. Banaue's striped textiles continue to be integral to all rites of passage such as marriages, special birthdays, mortuary and curing rites. As these cloths trace their origin to Ifugao creation myths and the spirit world, the same mythical font as the Ifugao people's sacred beliefs, they are an essential element in all ceremonial contexts. In their extensive interpretations of Ifugao mythology, early twentieth-century researchers such as Barton (1946, 1955) and Lambrecht (1939, 1958) repeatedly furnished links between cloth production and the cosmic world. Barton (1955:153-154), for example, outlined the myth of how weaving originated in the Ifugao Skyworld and translated chants which describe how the Ifugao picture their deities, not only in their own image, but "all wearing ritual loincloths, all wearing ritual skirts, all bedecked in blankets, beautiful all of them" (Barton 1946:135; cf. Lambrecht 1958:41, 1939:666) .

How then do these easily identified striped textiles manifest their meaning in contemporary Ifugao rituals and what are the implications for female producers? Sherry Ortner (1978:4-5) notes that ritual is a system of meanings conveyed by and for actors through the manipulation of symbolic objects and arrangements. As such, ritual is directed toward a transformation of the participants, either of individuals into new statuses or a group into a new or renewed sense of community. The use of ritual objects such as textiles manifest this transformation as they are the physical means through which this change is achieved.

In her discussion of ritual, Russell (1989:17) argues that we must examine not only the "preexisting set of conceptual understandings" that guide the interpretation and practice of ritual, but also the historical experience of changing political, economic and religious power relationships. Throughout the Spanish (1565-1898) and subsequent American (1898-1946) colonial periods, the ancestral cult in the Cordillera provinces proved to be remarkably resilient. During the early colonial period, celebration of the ancestral cult provided a visual statement proclaiming cultural resistance to Christian conversion and political domination. With the advent of a market economy and with increased political control and greater homogeneity among the general way of life of Cordillera peoples, the role of ritual and the use of ritual objects has emerged as a symbol of local, ethnic cultural identity (Russell 1989:19). The Ifugao, for example, continue to believe that the spirits of the dead dwell both in this world and in their sacred surrounding mountains. They believe that their ancestors must be respected and appeased with animal and material sacrifices in order to bring the community and family good luck and future prosperity. At the same time, the present-day boundaries of the Ifugao ancestral cult have proven to be porous enough to incorporate the external changes occurring in their increasingly commoditized and missionized society.

Rappaport (1979:125, quoted in Russell 1989:17, 19) maintains that it is the ability of ritual and of ritual objects to adapt to change by incorporating new "concrete" materials or ideas reflecting economic or political events, that allows the "higher-order" cosmological and symbolic meanings of religious ideology to persist. Ceremonial objects like textiles embody a transformative power in performance that structures meaning and encourages negotiation within a people's changing world. Striped textiles used in Ifugao ritual continue to chart the course of indigenous ceremony in a region which has undergone profound change. They co-exist in a setting where, from 1900, but increasingly since the 1950s, most Ifugao have been baptized as Roman Catholic and consider themselves active and observant Christians. Ifugao ritual and ritual objects also co-exist with a commercial market economy which began in the 1950s and, has accelerated since the 1970s with the growing tourist industry.

This juxtaposition has been facilitated by the Catholic Church's tolerance of animistic traditions throughout the Cordillera. For many years, the Church has viewed indigenous religions as "yet another religious route to God that is equally valid as long as Catholic doctrine is also maintained" (Russell 1989a:9; cf. Fry 1988:138-169). Indeed, the Ifugao, formerly headhunters like other Cordillera peoples, gave the Catholic Church little choice. What eventual success the Spanish friars achieved in attracting converts hinged on their strategy of tolerating the local ritual complex (Scott 1977:255). Conversion to Catholicism only increased during the American colonial period. Through their ongoing support of and participation in their ritual performances, the Ifugao have consciously maintained their distinctive system of social and resource exchange. The result is a complex pattern of ritual change and persistence that is "neither predetermined nor infinitely variable" (Russell 1989a:3).

At celebratory occasions such as rites of passage, the complex ethnic configurations, namely the use of traditional textiles and Catholic paraphernalia, reflect the integration of local attitudes toward accommodation. In many areas of the upland Philippines, religious conversion to Christianity is viewed as a civilizing mission intimately connected to national development and modernization. To be progressive is to follow Western religion. Thus the trappings of "progress" - elaborate coffins and formal Church services - join hands with Ifugao ritual textiles and animal sacrifices.

As illustration, I focus on the more elaborate and enduring rites, marriage, mortuary and curing rituals. Marriage ceremonies are divided between a Church service in which the

formal vows are exchanged and the subsequent celebration or *cañao* which is always held at the house of the bride in her village. In both venues, the bride and groom often wear at least one piece of traditional Ifugao costume. Women wear an Ifugao *tolge* or skirt, while men, less eager to don the *binuhla'n* or loincloth, drape either a *baya'ong* or *gamong* ceremonial blanket over their shoulders. In addition, each couple nominates two other couples, friends or close relatives, to be their primary and secondary sponsors. As part of the formal wedding party, the sponsors may also wear traditional dress to signify their roles as supporters of the bride and groom and as witnesses to the ceremony. Those sponsoring the *cañao* also give public recognition to the men and women wearing Ifugao ritual dress. Special dances are mounted calling, for example, for all women wearing traditional *tolge* or for all men in *binuhla'n*. At one wedding I attended, the differentials in dress were noted at a dance announced for all unmarried men wearing blue jeans. Celebrations such as weddings provide an opportunity for people to wear their best quality Ifugao textiles and for weavers to demonstrate their skills in cloth production.

At death and in the subsequent mortuary rites, living descendants sacrifice their acquired wealth to enable the souls of their material belongings to escort the deceased to the land of the dead. *Gamong* and *baya'ong* blankets particularly, are integral to this process. For example, during the formal mourning period which often lasts three to four weeks, the deceased is placed in a coffin and displayed for family members and friends. The body is usually dressed in his or her best ceremonial textiles - skirt or loincloth and blanket. In addition, *baya'ong* and *gamong* blankets line the interior of the coffin and as ceremonial offerings they drape its exterior. It is customary for the oldest child, male or female, to give a *gamong* or first-class blanket and for the younger children and any close relative or friend to give *baya'ong* or second-class blankets. More blankets, especially *gamong*, are donated the higher the status and the greater the wealth of the deceased. A narrow, blue and red striped length of cloth, which is attached to the ends of blankets and which was formerly used as a ceremonial headband, is often wrapped around the outside of the coffin as a seal between the top and bottom halves. Before the introduction of coffins, the body was only wrapped in blankets. Although the funerals I attended used wood coffins, one of the artisans with whom I worked had decided not to use a coffin during the mortuary rites held for her father in 1993. Her photographs of the funeral proceedings show the body positioned on a sofa enveloped only in *baya'ong* blankets and surrounded by family members, some playing guitars and others playing cards.

Ritual striped textiles denote the position of each person involved in the ritual proceedings. The priest officiating the ceremony is cloaked in a *baya'ong* blanket as are those who will perform the ritual animal sacrifice, one to three pigs. To demonstrate their grief and their respect for the deceased, mourners may also wrap themselves in blankets. During mortuary rituals, the souls of the deceased are formally invited to join the family of living relatives where they actively participate and solicit offerings from their descendants in return for bestowing wealth and prosperity. This transformation is made visible by placing the striped textiles belonging to the deceased in a rice winnowing basket, a symbol of fertility, and enticing the spirit to again cloth him- or herself in the garments. If the deceased is male, a loincloth and blanket are placed in the basket, if female, a skirt and blanket are used.

Each family member wanting to demonstrate his or her respect for the deceased, hosts a day of mourning by sponsoring the appropriate feast and ceremonies. They arrange for a local Ifugao priest to officiate the rite and to make the requisite sacrifice of pigs and chickens and they subsequently sponsor a feast of cooked rice and meat for friends and relatives. Ifugao bronze gongs ring out with great fanfare to announce when the deceased is being moved to a different location. The coffin, bedecked with blankets, the deceased's personal effects and emblems of Christianity such as a cross, is lifted high and carried to

another relative's home. At each venue, social relations are made visible and consolidated as relatives and friends donate additional blankets and gifts. While the bestowal of *gamong* or first-class blankets is expected if the deceased's family owns extensive rice land marking them as part of the landed elite, currently, anyone having enough cash to purchase *gamong* blankets, regardless of class, may offer them in such rites. At the conclusion of the mortuary ceremonies, all donated textiles are buried with the coffin.

Although the central tenets of the ancestral cult remain unchanged, the boundaries have been redrawn. The sacred sphere has been transformed through the appropriation of Catholic ritual objects and their integration into Ifugao indigenous rites. In this transformation, textiles may be best understood as actors playing a series of "bridging roles", not only between the mental and the physical world (Miller 1989:102-103), but also between Ifugao sacred custom and wider socio-economic forces. Textiles thus collapse the gaps between domains by crossing over oppositional spheres. When asked about this juxtaposition, the Ifugao with whom I spoke explained that the outward trappings of Catholicism demonstrate their modernity, but "without our traditions, there could be no funeral, no returning home for the spirits of our ancestors."

The ancestors are further placated through the performance of curing rites or *hongá* and through the bone wrapping ceremony or *mamong'an*. Both rituals may be performed at any time that the living want to appease and demonstrate their respect to their ancestors, either to acknowledge good fortune or to dispel misfortune such as illness. In these rites, usually commencing one year after death, the bodies of one's parents or grandparents are exhumed. The bones are then cleaned and subsequently wrapped in newly woven ritual textiles. The fresh wrappings demonstrate the concern of those living on earth for the souls of the those in the Skyworld. Following the ceremony, the newly enveloped bones are stored in the rafters under the house to ensure the ancestors that the living will watch over them. Often called a secondary burial, I suggest we regard this process as one of many reburials. If illness recurs, or if one again wants to show his or her appreciation to the ancestors for new prosperity, the wrapped bundles are taken from their resting place and rewrapped, yet again, in new striped textiles. They are never reburied, but become part of an ongoing cycle of ceremony and sacrifice.

While the Ifugao have incorporated the use of Christian services and ritual objects into their ancestral cult, the Catholic Church in Banaue has started to use Ifugao ritual textiles to decorate the interior of the Church and to augment its vestments. These textiles are draped over tables, decorate the walls and pillars of the Church and combined with flowers, they decorate the niches containing religious statues. Where ritual textiles specifically are not used, the weaving techniques involved in their manufacture may be employed to decorate religious garments and hangings. One of the ties of the priest's vestment, for example, displays a design which is woven in the same "warp-pick-up" technique as that of the animal and geometric figures in the striped blankets. This juxtaposition of objects, both in Ifugao ritual and within the Catholic Church in Banaue reinforces that things and the contexts within which they function are not fixed and static entities. Rather, as Thomas (1991:30,13) argues for the exchange and use of Western and Oceanic goods, such circumstances must be understood as "conjunctures" - situations in which the meanings of things as "composite" and "mutable" are recursively recast and recontextualized in use through their historical "entanglement" with different systems.

Earlier, this paper asked what do ritual textiles mean and what use are they? The complexity of this question begins to emerge as one realizes that in Banaue, ritual textiles are not one thing or another, but a thing in a certain situation (Kopytoff 1986:65). The meaning of ritual cloths shifts according to the context within which they function. Today, ritual textiles commonly appear in the secular sphere when worn as everyday garments.

Older women in particular, often wear ceremonial skirts as their daily dress as a marker of status and ethnic identity. *Baya'ong* blankets, while essential to mortuary rites, also make excellent baby carriers. Both men and women use these blankets to wrap and secure younger children to their back as they continue their work.

Moreover, ongoing ritual activities and the need for ritual textiles provide an economic stimulus for producers. Since not all women weave, ceremonial textiles may be commodities at the time of private transmission from producer to buyer in the village, or when the textiles are offered for sale publicly in the Saturday morning market. As Appadurai (1986:13; cf. Kopytoff 1986:68-69) argues, this "commodity situation" is the point in the artifact's life history in which its exchangeability for some other thing of equivalent value is its most socially relevant feature at that particular moment. As no ritual textile in Banaue is "above [commodity] exchange," these cloths emerge as both alienable and inalienable possessions (Weiner 1992:6,17); they participate in both ceremonial gift-giving and in commodity transactions. As commodities, ritual textiles may, in turn, acquire consumer power. The number of cloths a person is able to purchase to offer at rituals functions as a form of conspicuous consumption enhancing the purchaser's status. As such, the production of ceremonial cloths brings both recognition and moderate economic gain to the weaver while simultaneously imparting prestige to the purchaser.

Conclusion

This case study has emphasized that a meaningful analysis of the significance of Ifugao ritual textiles cannot be made apart from the contemporary economic, social and political contexts to which they respond. The persistence of Ifugao ritual activity and the continued use of readily recognizable textiles as ethnic markers, may be understood as a form of group resistance to the acculturation and ethnic homogenization that those in Banaue perceive as threatening to their own cultural framework and political autonomy (Russell 1989:19-20). Ritual and ritual objects such as textiles, thus provide an essential commentary about the relationships between social change and cultural identity.

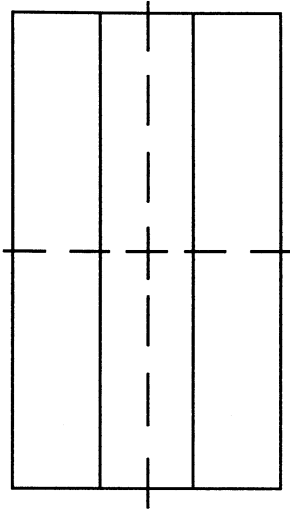
In Banaue, encounters between dominant and dominated groups have resulted in a blend of local and external customs, rather than leading to a unidirectional demise, marginalization of local religious traditions or simple accommodation. Banaue's ceremonial textiles and the rituals they serve must be understood as historically dynamic and still fluid phenomena. Their use and meaning continue to be transformed by the contexts in which they function.

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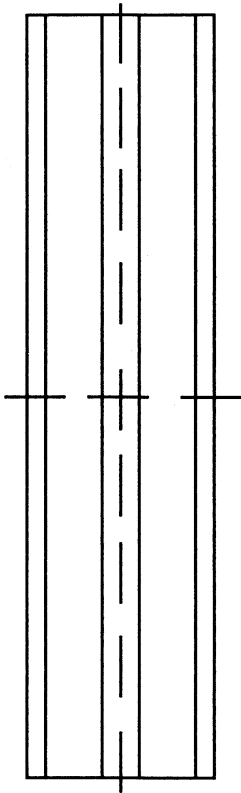
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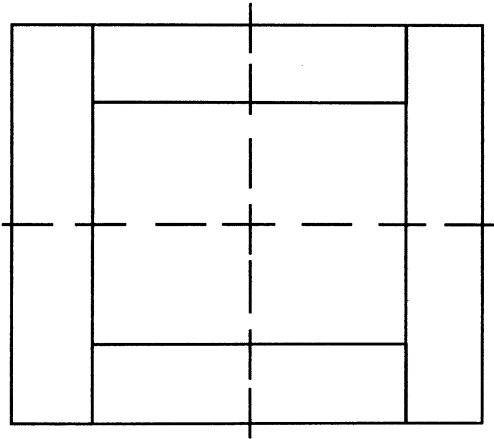
Figure 1: Biaxial reflection in Ifugao ritual textiles



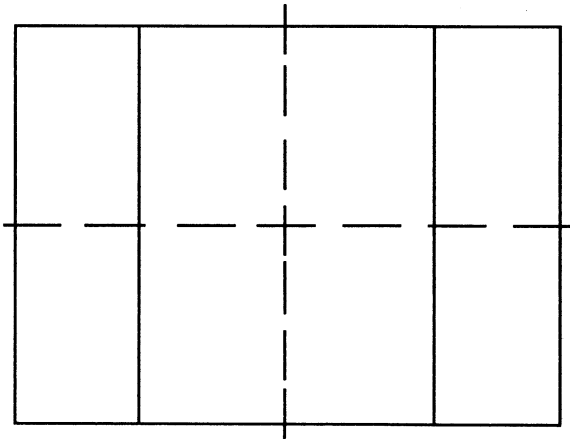
Ifugao Skirt



Ifugao Loincloth



Ceremonial (Gamong) Blanket



Ceremonial (Baya'ong) Blanket