

2015

## Barong Tagalong

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# Barong Tagalong

## **Abstract**

The barong tagalong, also known as the barong Filipino or simply the barong, is the national men's shirt of the Philippines. It is a long-sleeved, collared shirt, buttoning halfway down the front. Traditionally, the barong is made of white, transparent cloth with embroidery around the buttons. The shirt is usually woven out of pina fiber, which is harvested from the leaves of the pineapple plant.

## **Disciplines**

Art and Materials Conservation | Fashion Design | Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies | Fiber, Textile, and Weaving Arts

## **Comments**

This chapter is published as Skerston, S., McKinney, E. Barong Tagalog **In** M. Strauss and A. Lynch (Eds.), *Ethnic Dress in the United States: A Cultural Encyclopedia*. 2015; 19-21. Posted with permission.

Beginning in the 1970s, traditional paisley bandanas were utilized in inner-city gang culture to identify members. Each gang member wears the colored bandana that corresponds to their gang's colors. For example, two long-standing rival gangs that originated in Los Angeles, California, wear bandanas to distinguish loyalty. The Crips gang is identified by the blue bandana while the Bloods gang is identified by the red bandana. Just as bandanas serve as a means of identification within gang culture, bandanas also served as a means of communication within the homosexual community, with the trend peaking in urban United States in the 1970s and 1980s. Different colored bandanas and differing placements on the body communicated within the urban gay community various preferences for different sexual acts. This communication system was referred to as the bandana code and was used by potential partners to convey sexual availability and preferences.

*See also* BRICOLAGE; CHOLO STYLE; SERAPE; WESTERN WEAR

*Compare to* DO-RAG; KEFFIYEH; POWWOW ACCESSORIES; PASHMINA SHAWL AND SCARF; TURBAN

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■ JENNIFER DALEY

### BANDEAU

*See* BIKINI

### BANNER GOWN

*See* CHEONGSAM

### BARONG FILIPINO

*See* BARONG TAGALOG

### BARONG TAGALOG

The barong tagalog, also known as the barong Filipino or simply the barong, is the national men's shirt of the Philippines. It is a long-sleeved, collared shirt, buttoning halfway down the front. Traditionally, the barong is made of white, transparent cloth with embroidery around

the buttons. The shirt is usually woven out of piña fiber, which is harvested from the leaves of the pineapple plant.

## History

The history of the barong tagalog can be traced to precolonial times. The name literally translates to “the dress of Tagalog.” Tagalog is the language of the Philippines and the name of the people who lived on the island of Luzon before the Spaniards arrived. The original type of dress of the Tagalog people with its front opening, white color, and loose, tucked-out style resembles today’s barong tagalog. Before being conquered by the Spanish in the sixteenth century, native Filipinos hand wove piña, cotton, *jusi*, banana, and abaca fibers. The combination of Filipino weaving skills and Spanish embroidery led the way to articles of clothing made from piña that eventually became staples of dress in the Philippines.

The shirt may be transparent and worn tucked out because of the hot climate or because the embroidery was meant to be shown, but it also had political motives. During the Spanish colonial era, 1565 to 1898, the Spanish rulers forced the *Indios*, native Filipino men, to wear their shirts tucked out to show inferiority. The material was transparent, so weapons could not be hidden under the shirt, and there were no pockets in order to prevent stealing. As a middle class started to form, businessmen still had to wear the barong tagalog, but they added embroidery to the front of the shirt for decoration. During the American colonial period, 1902 to 1946, Filipino dress still represented colonization. Westernized formal wear was the norm during the American colonization because it symbolized wealth and political power, as well as modernity. The upper class wore Westernized clothing to signify their equality to Americans.

After achieving independence, the barong symbolized the Filipino “man of the masses.” Soon the shirt became a symbol of colonial resistance. In 1953, President Ramon Magsaysay wore a barong for his inauguration and other formal occasions to identify himself with the common people instead of the elite. Previous presidents embraced Westernized formal wear, but he wanted to project the image of simplicity and embody the “man of the masses.” In 1975, President Ferdinand Marcos came to power and also popularized the barong by wearing it on all occasions. Finding a picture of him without it is very rare. He even declared an official Barong Tagalog Week from June 5 to 11 to promote the shirt even further to the nation and expand its export opportunities.

The rise in barong popularity may also be accounted for because of the Filipinos’ new desire to have pride in their products, people, and nation as a whole. It was a staple in a man’s wardrobe by the end of the 1900s. The polo barong is the short-sleeved, more casual version of the barong tagalog. It was even further transformed into a shirt made of cotton or polyester and with little embroidery. Soon it became the uniform of government employees, many private companies, and even President Fidel Ramos, the twelfth president of the Philippines from 1992 to 1998. It was not until the 1990s that it became the norm for grooms to wear barongs at their weddings.

Today, Filipino men wear the barong at special formal events, and grooms traditionally wear long-sleeved ones for their wedding. They wear it not tucked in as a formal dress shirt with black pants. Eventually the barong tagalog became the dress given to foreign

dignitaries on official visits to the Philippines. It is also a tradition for leaders at Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meetings to wear the clothing of the host country for a leader's family photo.

### **The Barong Tagalog in the United States**

The barong came over to the United States with Filipino immigrants. Mass immigration started in the twentieth century when the Philippines was ceded to the United States. It is mostly prevalent in large Filipino communities in California, Hawai'i, and Chicago. Pierre Cardin, who opened the front, made it a full button-up instead of a pullover, pointed the cuffs, thickened the collar, and minimalized the embroidery, redesigned the barong in 1971. This style only remained popular until the 1980s. The Pierre Cardin barong tagalog was revolutionary because the silhouette was tapered in instead of loose fitting. This alteration of the traditional barong was proof that Filipino dress was internationally stylish and a gateway to introducing the shirt into couture fashion.

### **Influence and Impact**

In the United States, Filipino men wear it the same traditional way as an alternate to a suit or tuxedo. For example, Quentin Tarantino wore a barong tagalog to the Golden Globes nominations following his visit to the Philippines. Lesser-quality barongs can be made of *jusi*, which is a combination of silk and piña, and mechanically woven instead of handmade.

Because of the Filipinos' independence, the traditional dress became equal to other nations in the world. The barong tagalog originated as a sign of inferiority to the Spanish rulers, but with the promotion by several presidents, it turned into a symbol of overcoming colonialism and gaining independence.

*See also* ALOHA SHIRT (HAWAIIAN SHIRT)

*Compare to* BUSSEKULL (NORWEGIAN WORK SHIRT); DASHIKI; KIMONO; OXFORD SHIRT; POLO SHIRT

### **Further Reading**

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■ SABRINA SKERSTON AND ELLEN C. MCKINNEY

### **BATA CUBANA**

*See* RUMBA DRESS

### **BATIK CLOTH APPAREL**

An ancient resist technique commonly associated with the use of a melted, hot wax mixture being applied to fabric prior to being dyed to prohibit the dye from coloring the