On Wednesday, the Mexican government stated that it had sent a protest letter to Chinese budget fashion giant Shein for commercialising clothes featuring a pattern created by Mayan artisans.
The Mexican government “has sent a protest letter to fashion company Shein, asking it to publicly explain on what authority it is commercialising a collective property on a private basis,” the Mexican Ministry of Culture said.

On a blouse sold for $7 on its website, Shein “made use of elements whose origin is perfectly documented,” added the ministry, emphasising that “this kind of activity is harmful for the artisanal sector” and for “the livelihood of the original designers, who in this instance live among the Mayan communities.”

Artisanal brand Yucachulas has posted pictures on social media showing that the blouse sold by Shein closely replicates the design of an item made by Yucachulas in 2017. Yucachulas said that these blouses, made by the Mayan community, are “an integral part of the Mayan people’s identity,” and are an “economic means for their daily subsistence.”

In recent years, the Mexican government has repeatedly lodged protests with various fashion brands, from Spanish giant Zara to labels like Carolina Herrera and Isabel Marant, for using elements typical of the culture of Mexico’s indigenous peoples in their collections, denouncing the practice as “unwarranted cultural appropriation.”

In November 2021, the government invited a number of foreign fashion labels to Mexico, to spend a weekend talking with native textile artisans.

*Mexico, July 21 2022 (AFP)*

Translated by Nicola Mira