

Polo Shirts and Its Reflection on Subculture in a Century from 1920s

Xiaoting Liu^{2, †}, Zihan Liu^{1, †}, Siyi Yu^{3, †}, Xiaobei Zhou^{4, *, †}

¹College of Jewellery, Guangzhou City University of Technology, Guangzhou, 510000, China, 553270464@qq.com

²International Business School of Foreign Languages, Hebei Finance University, Baoding, 071000, China, liuzihan1016@163.com

³Institute of finance and economics, Zhejiang Vocational and Technical College of Industry, Shao Xing, 312000, China, 2840681077@qq.com

⁴Shanghai Adcote School, Shanghai, 200000, China, xiaobei041203@163.com

*Corresponding author. Email: guanghua.ren@gecademy.cn

†These authors contributed equally.

ABSTRACT

Mentioning the polo, short sleeves, two side vents, and sport shirt are the basic characteristics. In addition, it is well-known that they were derived from polo and tennis. Currently, polo shirts become golf and yachting clothing. Due to the evolution of fashion, polo has become the popular school uniforms. They are the representation of "college style" and class status symbol.

As the era goes, the old brands are gradually being sifted out. For the continuity of these 'outdated' brands, some businesses adopt co-branding to fascinate consumers. What's more, garments are a part of culture embodiment. This paper expounds the design, culture, development, modern polo and the combination between polo and newborn, or even renascent elements. In addition, the affection and influence of co-branding are mentioned.

Keywords: Polo shirt, subculture, fashion, classic changes.

1. INTRODUCTION

Polo shirt, also known as tennis shirt, was originally worn by aristocrats when playing polo [1]. As early as the 19th century, the prototype of the Jersey polo shirt appeared on Jersey island. After a period of development, it has gradually formed today's common styles. Over time, it was called "polo shirt" by people. Later, it was widely loved by the public, so it evolved into general casual clothing.

Polo shirt was once regarded as one of the symbols of aristocracy. In this social context, how did polo shirts representing the upper class evolve into people's daily clothes and continue to develop so far? Taking polo shirts as an example, this paper discusses the changes of the applicable groups of polo shirts in various periods under the influence of the subculture trend of thought in Britain and the United States.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLO SHIRT

2.1. Design

Originally conceived as a purely sporting and functional garment, the polo shirt has evolved over the course of human history into a fashionable and popular garment. The polo shirt is relatively simple but has a distinctive flavour. However, the design of the polo shirt is mainly based on the functionality of the fabric and the decorative details.

The functional design of polo fabrics includes antibacterial and environmental protection, deodorisation and fast moisture wicking. For professional sports polo shirts, we use moisture wicking fibres, antibacterial fibres, environmental protection fibres and finishing techniques to give the fabric functionality, and then develop multifunctional fabrics such as water repellent and wash-free, air conditioner and anion health care. [2]. In addition to the common knitted fabrics such as cotton and linen, technology has

also been used to develop fabrics that maintain the breathable softness of cotton and have bright and silky characteristics, such as milk silk polo shirts. [3]. This shows that the development of polo shirts is influenced by the design of the fabrics used in polo shirts.

In terms of decorative detailing, polo shirts are now more diverse than those previously designed in a single colour, with decorative patterns such as the usual Scottish checks, stripes, pop patterns and fun accents [1].

The innovation of decorative patterns on polo shirts is also inseparable from the continuous development of garment technology, such as paint dyeing, collage and printing, which makes the pattern texture more three-dimensional and the colours more vivid [2].

Although the style of the polo shirt remains the same, it is the innovative use of polo shirt design elements and comfortable fabrics that meet the aesthetic needs of modern consumers, and Benefits from the rapid development of clothing science and technology, the polo shirt has been able to absorb new cultural features and integrate them in the process of diversification, so that the polo shirt has achieved innovation in detail design, which has made the polo shirt a classic and fashionable This has laid the foundation for the polo shirt to become a classic and fashionable garment.

2.2. Culture

In Britain at the beginning of the last century, tennis was a noble sport representing the upper class society, and Fred Perry, as a child of a working family, suffered discrimination and ridicule. But after sweeping the Wimbledon Championships several times, Fred Perry was finally recognized. His success has also become a symbol of breaking the class power in the hearts of the British, and laid a cultural foundation for the development of the later trend. With the great success of Fred Perry in his personal sports career, the Fred Perry brand has also achieved success in the field of sportswear.

However, with the popularity of mod culture in the 1960s and 1970s, it evolved from a brand to a cultural symbol, and Fred Perry developed from producing sportswear to producing casual wear.

Mods, as one of the subcultures, originated from Britain in the 1960s. Although the original mod nationality is the next generation of the middle and lower classes, it has a stable income, pursues to enjoy life and youth, yearns for a drunken upper class society, and pays great attention to appearance and clothing.

With the continuous development of the times, dressing is not only the need of life, but also a way to pursue the embodiment of self-worth, and pay more attention to the cultural meaning behind clothing.

Because of this change, Fred Perry polo shirt with resistance gene has successfully entered fashion and street from sportswear.

Nowadays, from the perspective of the whole clothing market, Ralph Lauren and polo Polo sometimes form an organic combination, which can better represent the classic style of the United States. In addition, due to its positioning in the high-end market, the competition is not fierce, and it has accumulated high brand value over the years.

With the continuous development of social economy and garment production technology, the classic traditional polo shirt is also innovating and developing in function and design. Although the style of polo shirt is basically unchanged, it is precisely because the innovative use of polo shirt design elements and comfortable fabrics meet the aesthetic needs of modern consumers, and relying on the rapid development of garment science and technology, constantly absorb and integrate new cultural characteristics in the process of diversified development, so that polo shirt has realized innovation in details. It has become a classic and fashionable fashion. It can be seen from the above literature that the positioning of polo shirts has changed in the crowd and the function of polo shirts. The consumer positioning group has changed from high-end group to middle-class group; In terms of function, it has changed from sports clothing to leisure clothing.

3. DESIGNS OF POLO SHIRT AND SUBCULTURE

3.1. Lacoste: The Origin of Polo Shirt

The legend of the French LACOSTE brand was born in 1933, when the French tennis champion Rene Lacoste made light and breathable small convex mesh fabric into a light and comfortable short-sleeved shirt, replacing the stiff traditional long-sleeved shirt, and set off a men's revolution, thus creating the now-known LACOSTE classic POLO shirt [4]. Over the past 80 years, LACOSTE has been constantly innovating, always pursuing an elegant and comfortable style, and gradually becoming a brand reflecting the elegant French lifestyle. LACOSTE has always taken authenticity, excellence, and elegance as important elements of brand success.

The origin of the "crocodile" is actually very simple. In a Davis Cup match, France captain Allan H. Muhr bet Rene Lacoste an alligator leather suitcase if he could win an important match for the team. The Boston Evening News reported on the anecdote and said that Rene Lacoste was affectionately called the "crocodile". The legend was born. Since then, the American public has liked the nickname because it embodies the Rene Lacoste's crocodile-biting score and tenacity on the

court. Rene Lacoste's friend Robert George designed his one-of-a-kind crocodile logo, which was then embroidered on his tennis shirt to move the legend to the world.

The LACOSTE POLO shirt was born in the late 1920s, and Rene Lacoste designed and ordered a batch of breathable and comfortable knit cotton shirts for himself. They sweat and are perfect for wearing on hot American courts. Immediately, the shirt created a revolution among tennis players because they were playing in traditional long-sleeved shirts made of regular cloth. The first LACOSTE POLO shirt was white, slightly shorter than the current style, short sleeved and rib collar. The famous "small bump mesh" fabric is both light and breathable. In 1933, Rene Lacoste worked with the famous knit fabric manufacturer Andre Gillier to start the mass production of lapel jerseys with crocodile logo, LACOSTE L.12.12 POLO shirt; L represents LACOSTE, 1 for small convex mesh fabric, 2 for short sleeve style (13.12), 12 represents the number of samples experienced before the futuristic POLO shirt.

At the beginning between the late 1970s and the 1980s, LACOSTE had crossed the boundaries of tennis, being able to "explode" in some street scenes related to youth culture at the time. We all know that the Stone Island outbreak was because of football hooligans. In addition, football hooligans have also derived a series of "rogue" items: a C.P Company goggles jacket covering half a face, all with Stone Island side targets, and adidas limited sneakers (Nike was a small brand at that time). After that, because of the various bad behaviors of the football hooligans and the Heather's tragedy, this group began to be concerned by all sectors of society, so that the "Football Hooliganism" has become a dressing style, and the police can distinguish them through the brands that these football hooligans wear. In the late 1970s, more and more club fans became popular, so to prevent themselves from being targeted by the police, football hooligans began to wear expensive brands to hide their identities, and the subcultural dress style emerged. As a result, in the 1980s, Hooligans began to mix more couture fashion, Polo shirts, tennis shoes, etc., and gradually evolved into the Terrace Wear style represented by subculture, Like the current luxury fashion are chasing Logo, at that time, the Lacoste with the Logo on his chest was also included in the street style because of the little crocodile logo.

3.2. Fred Perry: Style Warfare in Britain

Fred Perry is the sports brand created by the collaboration between the talented British tennis player Fred Perry, a four-time Wimbledon champion, and the Austrian footballer Tibby Wegner.

At the beginning of the last century, tennis was an aristocratic sport representing the upper classes and Fred Perry, a child of a working-class family, was subjected to discrimination and ridicule. But after sweeping several Wimbledon titles, Fred Perry was finally recognised. His success became a symbol of the breaking down of class power in the minds of the British and set the cultural underpinnings for the trends that would follow.

With the Mod Culture boom of the 1960s and 1970s, Fred Perry evolved from a brand to a cultural icon, moving from the sports arena to the streets and becoming one of the great leaders of class struggle in the minds of the working class of the era [5].

Mods, as one of the subcultures, originated in Britain in the 1960s. The original Mods, although the next generation of the lower middle class, had a stable income, sought to enjoy life and youth, aspired to the high society of paper and money, and were extremely conscious and meticulous about their appearance and clothing [5].

In post-World War II Britain, people wore old-fashioned Suits & Tees, but it wasn't until the 1960s that mods came into the picture that people started to dress differently. Young street mods were taking off their suits and putting on fashionable pieces. As a result of their obsession with fashion, mods broke the boundaries of clothing and started to dress in a way that was no longer functional.

The later mods, however, were influenced by a culture rooted deep in the British soul, a reverence for the traditional British gentleman's culture and a taste for elegant yet street wear. For this group of working class and street mods, there was a quick resonance with the working-class tennis player Fred Perry, whose comeback, as a confrontation between the working class and the aristocracy, created a strong sense of identification with the then working class, who began to wear Fred Perry's polo shirts, which were free, stylish and uninhibited, and to wear them with military jackets or with a dress code. Perry polo shirts were worn with military trench coats or jackets, which at the time could be described as a form of rebellion and disdain for the upper classes.

With the development of mods culture, dressing is not only a necessity, but also a way of pursuing self-worth and the cultural meaning behind the clothes. As a result of this change, the Fred Perry polo shirt has successfully moved from sportswear to fashion and street wear, and has also started to change the class of people who can wear polo shirts.

Fred Perry's development is inextricably linked to subculture, and to this day, Fred Perry's connection to subculture remains unbroken. Fred Perry has played a very important role in the development of subculture,

both in terms of spreading it and back to the clothing itself, and continues to work on exporting more diverse clothing to the young people who love subculture and bringing more diverse clothing to the public.

3.3. Ralph Lauren: Style Warfare in America

Nowadays, Polo shirt gradually enter streets from the original Noble Group. Undoubtedly, it has a long history and profound cultural accumulation. In almost every historical period, a brand and its fanatical followers have become the backbone to promote the development of polo.

In the United States in the 1990s, only from the perspective of classic and retro leisure, there is a brand that must be mentioned, that is Ralph Lauren. Its Polo style are second to none, deeply rooted in the hearts of the people, and has become one of the brands that can not be ignored in American history. It has a strong American flavor, and the Polo style of retro sports aesthetics in the 1990s was born under the proposition of "highly stylized style" by designer Ralph Lauren.

Before the 1990s, in the United States, polo shirts were still positioned as upper-class society, high-income people, and some luxury goods. In this atmosphere, Ralph Lauren was a brand dedicated to serving the white middle class. However, in ten years ago, it can be found that the American economic environment in the early 1980s was very depressed, bad atmosphere prevailed, and a large number of black groups emerged in some parts of New York. This is precisely an era when hip hop music has reached its peak. Many factors have contributed to the emergence of a group called Lo lifes.

As a giant in the fashion industry, Ralph Lauren's polo shirt is luxurious rather than extravagant, noble but approachable, full of fashion elements, but will not deviate too far from the tradition. This design attracts Lo lifes, which is a maverick gang. In the chaotic situation, they enter the store and rob with a high profile, decorated with Ralph Lauren from beginning to end, and almost monopolize all styles of polo shirts in Brooklyn, New York. Even the first syllable of their names comes from the word "polo".

Hip hop culture, as a cultural style with mixed praise and criticism, is usually regarded as a negative subculture representative, because it does not fit in with the propaganda system of different mainstream cultures. The characteristic of going its own way brings a group of people who are ignored by the society and have distinctive personalities together to pursue a sense of identity. In this case, hip hop music struggles with the social status quo with the spirit of resistance and passion. They are moved by Polo style dressing and deeply attracted by Polo's charm, and Ralph Lauren has become their favorite. The famous rappers on the east

coast were loyal to this brand without exception. In 1994, a polo snow beach Pullover appeared in Wu Tang clan's can it be all so simple MV, and the transaction price is still more than 2000 US dollars. It can be seen that the impact of hip-hop culture on the development of polo is not only confined to that specific era, but gradually penetrated and far-reaching.

There is no doubt that Lo lifes is the beginning of promoting polo shirts into American street culture and fashion brands.

No matter what kind of development path the era pushes polo shirt to, Ralph Lauren's unique fashion taste, eternal American spirit and firm personal style are the reasons for its long history. With the popularity of polo shirts in hip-hop, they have attracted the attention of leaders of many street brands. James Jebbia, the founder of supreme, makes no secret of his love for polo, and many of his design styles are almost integrated into the whole series of supreme.

Under the influence of Ralph Lauren, more and more artists began to pay attention to brands other than streets and sports. The iconic Lo lifes has left their historical and cultural brand in this fashion period.

"My design goal is to achieve an imaginable reality. It must be a part of life form and become personalized with the passage of time." Ralph Lauren's fashion concept is destined to shine in this special era. His pioneering aesthetic orientation helped Polo start the style warfare in the 1990s and laid a contemporary free, comfortable, luxurious, and restrained style.

3.4. Style and Classic Change of Modern Polo Shirt

Since 2018, the Chinese consumer market has sprung up many joints or combinations with the old brand, such as DaBaiTu, WangWang, and the Palace Museum. [6] These cooperative products once became "hot cake" when they appeared on the market. They are popular among consumers, especially youngsters. Under present circumstances, it is difficult for the old brand to back in the public view. For the continuity of the old brand, a part of the product has combined many brand-new elements. Therefore, brand collaboration takes place in the market. In terms of polo, it must mention the ancestor, Lacoste, Fred Perry, etc. When polo and new elements encounter, outstanding inspiration can also be freed.

The embodiment of polo quality is to enable people can move freely and comfortably in polo. This garment adopts a symmetrical and fair shaped segmented structure to show the stretch when doing sports. A ribbed collar is the most classic collar used in the polo shirt. The other contour is stiff and smooth—the sleeve type centres on the short sleeve and the hem slits.

What’s more, the combed cotton used on polo meets the need for air permeability and comfort. This kind of simple clothes may become a necessity in people’s wardrobe. However, due to the rapid development of fashion trends, polo is always labelled as “out-of-dated”. According to our questionnaire, young people supposed that although polo can pair with any other clothes, the design does not enjoy popular support. For the pie chart, we can see that the design occupies a large proportion, for approximately 42%. Nowadays, several brands use the polo version or add designers’ artwork on polo. This work brings up the popularity of brands and designers and makes polo become a hot trend.

Above all, polo shirt co-brands with fashion icons. For example, the well-known Lacoste cooperate with PEANUTS, which make the clothes fill with childishness and playfulness. It is no doubt that the enthusiasts will buy it for PEANUTS. This cooperation enhances brand awareness.

In the next place, the brands adopt the polo shirt type. For instance, the luxury brand Dior adopted the sports style polo, matched with the classic strip-shaped logo “Christian Dior”, which improved style. Nacre button, two side vents, the combination of polo and Dior elements add more elegance and chic.

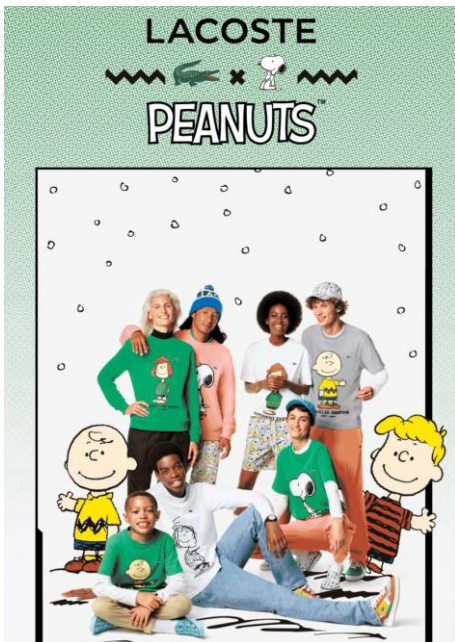
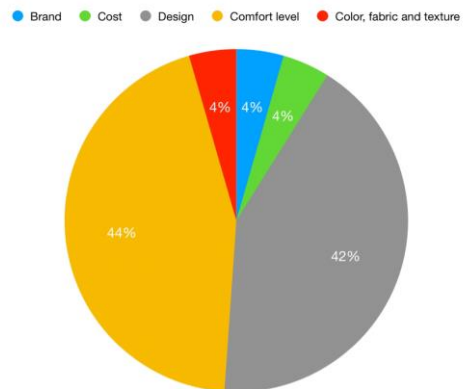


Figure 1 The co-branding between LACOSTE and PEANUTS.



Figure 2 Polo of Christian Dior.

Table 1. The datas on what people consider when they are choosing polo.



4. CONCLUSION

With the development of human history, there are only a few clothing styles that we can continue to wear today, and the Polo shirt with its classic style evolved from a special sports style into one of the most common clothing styles we wear today[2].

The featured polo shirts appeared in the late 19th century for privileged people, and were an integral part of the playing polo and riding sport uniforms. And the collar must have buttons, for so, when riding on horseback, it will not unfold because of the wind[7]. But Rene Lacoste (the seven-time French Grand Slam champion) considers tennis suits bulky and uncomfortable. The Lacoste (1930 s) invented a polo shirt with short sleeves, a soft collar and a crocodile logo, making the polo world famous. Different from the T-shirt, the Polo shirt usually has a collar and a flap, generally two to three buttons, the texture is generally pure cotton, the fabric has a net, flat lines and other knitting patterns[1]. But later rapper in the United States

transformed the polo shirts into their own style in the 1980s and '90s, bringing the upper lifestyle to the street. The most well-known members of the rap group Brooklyn-based Lo-life enjoyed stealing polo shirts in the Ralph Lauren store (so the hip-hop was actually a bad culture at that time)[9].

The Polo shirt now has three positions: one is the Polo shirt of sports clothing: tennis, polo, golf and so on; the two is the Polo shirt of casual clothing; three is the Polo of team clothing. With the retro trend is rampant, 'Dad T-shirts' have also become a necessary item for everyone. With street and skateboard brands repushing the Polo shirt into the mass market, it serves not only as a substitute for the T-shirt, but also as an important look on the T stage [10]. It is not difficult to see that the retro casual clothing has a comeback potential. A heavy print or soft knit with a plain knit collar and metal zipper for a modern look.

Due to the manufacturing technique, modern design and brand effect, polo shirts become one of the basic items that are indispensable for casual wear- sporty, simple but still a little bit more elegant than a simple T-shirt. Polo shirts are trend pieces that can be seen on the catwalks of the men's fashion weeks in Paris and Milan, as the Spring/Summer 2022 season shows. Oversized, pattern, Knitwear, polo shirts rethought and "back to basic", these are all worth considering module. More and more accessible collocations that provide fashion icons variable options. For instance, one of the easiest ways to make polo different is oversized. The widen shirts were popular within skating and street wear scenes, especially in the early 2000s. [11] It is still a trend at present. In terms of the data, it shows that especially girls tend to wear oversized polo. They suggest that it will seem to be neutral style, making them cooler that looks like a tomboy.

REFERENCES

- [1] Wu Zhiming, Xia Dongqin, Wang Yingying. Art Features of T-shirt positioning pattern [J]. *Silk*,2019(12):86-91.
- [2] Wu Zhiming, Xia Dongqin. The Application of Detail Design in Polo Shirt [J]. *Knitting Industry*,2019(06):60-63.
- [3] Qi Weihuan, Dong Wei. Artistic aesthetics and Application of Design Elements in Polo Shirts [J]. *Silk*,2013(06):50-55.
- [4] Anonymous. LACOSTE[J]. *Tomorrow's fashion (great event)*,2006(01):75
- [5] Zeng Jing. Class Embodiment in British Youth Subculture-----A Study on the Class Relativity to British Youth Subculture after WWII(1950s-1970s).[D].Sichuan International Studies University,2010.(01):46.
- [6] Wang Xiufen. Co-branding: The New Marketing Approaches for Old Brand, [J]. *Northern Media Research*, 2019(06):26-28.
- [7] Chen Tianxiong. The self-made success of Ralph Lauren,[DB/OL],2021-08-18.
- [8] Anonymous. LACOSTE[J].*Tomorrow's fashion (great event)*,2006(01):75
- [9] Ya Danli. The history of the Polo shirt,[DB/OL],2019-07-23.
- [10] Sankou. Fashion & Aging Polo Skirt,[J]. *Consumption Guide*.2020(05):25-27..
- [11] Ole Spotter. More thana casual classic: ThenSS22 polo shirt trends. [J/OL] <https://fashionunited.com/news/fashion/more-than-a-casual-classic-the-ss22-polo-shirt-trends/2021072841261#:~:text=A%20polo%20shirt%20is%20one%20of%20those%20basic,and%20Milan%2C%20as%20the%20Spring%2FSummer%202022%20season%20shows.,> 2021-7-28