

Fashion Revolution in the 20th Century

- *The appearance of knit wear* -

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ABSTRACT

In the history of fashion, the category of knitted items was traditionally associated with ordinary clothing products like undergarments and socks. However, in a mere century Chanel has changed that idea by bringing into fashion consciousness items such as sports sweaters, jerseys, and suits, and so it has been necessary to upgrade this notion. As the needs of the times and new inventions have an inseparable relationship, knit fashion was also born with a close relationship with the zeitgeist of the time - the feminine movement, the rise of sports fashion and the world war - adapting itself up to the present time through continuous changes.

Most brands are elevating knit from a mere decoration into a collection piece in a large number of collections every year. The number of brands that cannot exist without knit is increasing, such as Sonia Rykiel, Missoni, and so on.

This essay is written with the purpose to study the birth, growth and future potential of knit items. The first stage concentrates on the age of knit's appearance (1910s-1930s). Contingent upon the collection of further data, this essay will be continued through the second stage (the 1960s - 1970s) and the third stage (after the 1980s).

Key Words : knit wear, 20th Century, functionality, voluptuous characteristic, practicality

I. Introduction

Since the time of the European nobles who were the fashion leaders in the Elizabethan age wore hand-knitted stockings instead of hempen socks, knit has been commonly used in a variety of fashion items. Knit was only used for under clothes with its distinctive qualities of elasticity and practicality, but now it has come into the spotlight as an im-

portant material for fashion design by gradually expanding its domain.

In 1916, Chanel stunned the fashion industry with a refreshing surprise by using knit which had only previously been used as a material for under clothes to make outer garments. As a result, knit got a chance to be accepted as a novel fashion item. Considering these things, the appearance of the Chanel suit can be regarded as a kind of revolution that started knit on its path to recognition as a true fashion item.

Chanel has been recognized as a creative pioneer in modern fashion for having boldly introduced knit suited to the modern needs of fashion design. The milestone of the jersey, which had been cheap, functional and only considered as belonging in the underclothes category, was turned into an important item for outer wear by Chanel and served as a momentum and harbinger for a new revolution of fashion. Of course, even before Chanel, some fashion leaders wore knitwear in the form of men's clothes or sportswear, not because of some notion that it was fashionable but for more practical concerns. Knit got more direct opportunities to be seen in public through diverse social changes such as the world war, the feminist movement and a growing sports movement.

The Twenty-First century is often referred to as the 'age of leisure'. This signifies that an issue of concern to the modern mind was the guarantee of time off work, and the effective use of that time. This change in outlook, combined with increased consumer awareness, necessitated the appearance of knit material and designs, which matched the functionality, practicality and aesthetic nature of the era. Knit was universally acknowledged as the single best item that could meet this combination of requirements with its unique qualities. This recognition has taken scarcely 100 years to take hold, and it is today an essential item in all designers' collections.

Therefore, this study proposes to analyze the background of the appearance of knitwear, which has since become an essential item for modern wear, and the image and formative characteristics that knitwear had in these formative days.

First, for this purpose, the author looked at the conception, history and characteristics of knit, and in particular analyzed representative designers and

the knitwear that they designed in the period background of 1910-1930 when knit began to emerge as a fashionable item. However, there is a dearth of relative papers and data on this subject, while at the same time there are many studies duplicating the same information. Although this study is limited by these practical concerns, the author is quite relieved to note that recently scholastic interest in knit is finally being expressed.

II. The Common Conception of Knit

1. The Concept and History of Knit

Knit is formed by connection of loops that are made by woofs. The category includes every kind of woven fabric, irrespective of materials and techniques, but in a narrow sense, it is associated with the methods that make loops with threads or strings and then form line or surface by connecting them, and the products that are made from this technique. In Korea, several terms such as *knit*, *knitwear*, *knit work*, *sweater*, *jersey*, all denote knit.

The word 'knit' comes from the word "cristan" in the Saxon language, which means 'to make woven material or clothing by hand'; it was recorded by an English historian in 1942, for the first time. Around the 16th century when the word was not yet used in the English language, the word 'merias' was used. This was derived from the Spanish word *medias* or Portuguese word *meias* and denotes *socks* in modern English.

The beginning of its use as a material of clothing is not certain. It is supposed by some that there were knit-wear garments in Troy, ca. the 18th century B.C, but it is uncertain. Similarly, it is alleged but unproved that the socks that in the pos-

session of the Leicester Museum in Britain are from the 5th century, having been discovered in Antinoe, Egypt with a number of fabrics. One may suppose that knit was first used to make socks because of its pliability, which is ideal for the contour and movement of feet. Knit has also been found among the cushions and hats discovered in a 13th century Spanish grave. It is interesting to note in particular that this early pioneer of knitted hats was given a license by the government, which was seeking to limit excessive profits on hats.

The use of mechanical methods to make knit (merias) started in 1589, after the invention of 'Manual Socks Knitting Machine' by William Lee of Great Britain. Although the construction of this machine was somewhat crude, it was a great invention as the working principle is still used in the latest 'Full Fashion Knitting Machine'. After Lee, many people have continuously invented and improved knitting machines. Thus in the 18th century, machines like the basic Rib Knitting Machine and Circular Form Knitting Machine were developed.

Historically knitwear was originally used for practical purposes - the preservation of body heat, protection of the body, or mobility for athletes- and it developed from single items such as hats, gloves, and socks, to whole clothes. Knit has been recommended by health experts since 1850, such as Dr. Jaegen who extolled the virtues of wool jersey underwear in the publication "Essays on Health Culture", thus aiding its commercial success.

As the 19th Century's custom of wearing extra layers of clothing gradually simplified and gave in to concerns for ease of motion, knit underwear also gave way to knit outer garments. The sweater, originally designed to absorb sweat during exercise, also gained vogue as an item of women's wear. All of this preceded and led up to the new vogue of

knit cardigans and jackets. A great wave of interest in sports wave and the women's emancipation movement from the latter half of the 19th century to the first half of the 20th century established knit as a fashionable item, and perhaps of as a consequence of a good match between consumer desires for comfort and freedom and the intrinsic qualities of knit.

After the First World War, the international knit industry grew fast, and was centered in Italy, but the highest grade knit such as cashmere was produced in Scotland. Producers from Scotland supplied American and French design houses with their products while exporting their classical items to Japan or South America with their own brand. For a long time knit wear was recognized as functional and practical clothing, but the polished style of the Twin set created by Pringle in 1930s was recognized as classical fashion, and British knit industry centered on Scotland was revitalized by the classic fashion associated with the weekend style of British aristocrats. In the 1940s and 1950s, the 'Sweater Girl' fashion appeared through the influence of Hollywood. The clothes made full use of knitwear's elasticity so that they emphasized not only body shapes but also skeleton structures. In 1960s, the 'Skinny Rib' fashion emerged, which applied the same kind of rib to make clothes cling to the body. This was also the time when the avant-garde black polo neck that was associated with existentialism came into fashion.

In the meantime, the quality and techniques of Italian knitwear had developed steadily, and the particularly refined casual style was internationally popular. Therefore, in the 1970s, Milan was still a global fashion center. Variety hand-knitted knit wear was revived in the 1970s, according to the demands of the period, which appreciated handmade and

unique knit wears. Psychological objection to uniformity and a common feeling of brotherhood from resistance to mass production played no small role here.

In the 1980s, fashion sense was influenced by stark minimalism to create comfortable and fine, simple but remarkably well designed knit wears, and pursued a fresh classical style.

2. Characteristics of Knit

Knit forms loops or rings by entangling strings or threads lengthwise or crosswise. Therefore, rapid production and corrections are possible. It has many merits in terms of its physical qualities, elasticity, droppable property, anti-friction, etc. The general properties of knit are:

① Elasticity - The representative characteristic of knit. It is easily extended and recovered because each part of threads is organized by loops, which are relatively free in comparison with textile fabrics. However, this could be a weak point when expressing the shape. Suits for sportswear or underwear need to have athletic mobility, soft-to-the-touch feel, and functional qualities.

② Easy Correction - Unlike textile, knit can be made in a variety of methods by combining colors and patterns or increasing and decreasing loops according to measure.

③ Economical Efficiency - Because it is possible to correct while knitting, there is less loss from cutting than general manufacture. It is also possible to unweave and reuse when change of design is wanted, granting more distinctiveness.

④ Droppable Property - Due to the property of knit-structure, movements of fiber and strings are free, therefore it does not give any feeling of restraint. In addition, it is flexible, soft, and drop-

pable so it fits the body and silhouette. Nevertheless, because of lack of form-safety, it is easily deformed by laundry or long-term wearing and is inappropriate for garments, which need to have a fixed shape.

⑤ Anti-friction - Knit is susceptible to friction, because it usually uses cotton yarn or ornamental yarn, which is less snarled and constricted, and made nappy by friction, and thus loses its gloss. As a result, a change in external form and aesthetical loss occurs. Severe friction triggers the 'run' phenomenon, resulting from strand breakage.

⑥ Porosity - The spaced property of the knit strands means that it contains more air than other textiles. Therefore, it is heat retaining, moist-transmitting, and hygienic but it is easy to feel cold drafts of air through the material.

⑦ Run - When one loop snaps, knit disentangles in ladder-form, and this is called run, similar to laddering. Compound tricot (entangled with two kinds of threads) and weaving, unweaving or non-run process (glues with synthetic resins) are used to prevent run.

⑧ Curl Up - It refers to a phenomenon where the edge of the knit is curled up, which creates difficulty in knitwear design, cutting and sewing. It is excessive in 'flat side knits' but it does not appear in 'rubber side knits', 'garter side knitting (garter stitch)', and 'both side knitting'. Recently curl up has been adapted as a design feature.

III. Knitwear Processed into Fashion

1. Periodic Background

In fashion history, for a new design to be popularized, the parameters of the period such as poli-

tics, economics, society and culture figured in as important variables. For the appearance of knit, it is said that largely three parameters have had effect. Firstly, the women's liberation movement, secondly, the First World War and thirdly, the rise of sports fashion. The period from 1916, when the Chanel jersey suit appeared for the first time, to the 1930s when knitwear was developed into a fashion item, was historically an exceedingly confusing and dynamic period. The First World War, which broke out in 1914, affected the clothes of aristocrats and their wealth as well. At the time when labor and resources were insufficient, clothes needing complicated process such as laundering, ironing and basting, or that were hard to produce, or that restricted movement were considered unpractical, thus practical, plain and polished fashion was more desirable. Therefore, the advent of the jersey suit became an opportunity for the conversion of fashion by using men's underwear material to make outer garments and jerseys, drawing upon the practical and idiosyncratic character of knit.

Surely one cannot deny the practical aspects of a knit tailored suit, but it also could be seen as another process of social change, with meaning for women's liberation, which contributed by feminizing men's clothing elements. At any rate, at that time, the movement of women's rights was becoming a great social issue: in 1912, there were 17,000 women who participated in a demonstration parade that proclaimed women's right to vote. In addition, as women's role became more industrially important, to replace men who served in the army, women who were formerly engaged in domestic chores or primary industries became promoted to important roles in secondary industries through tertiary industries; thus working women needed polished and comfortable clothes. Because of this, Chanel's jersey

suit also received the honor of having made Haute Couture show interest in clothes for working women.

The wave of popularity of sports since the latter half of the 19th century affected mostly knitwear's fashion and popularization, and was a herald of the concept of sports and casual wear, which would be the 20th century's important fashion keyword. Knit upper garments fashion started more rapidly among men's clothes than among women's. They soon became essential item for dandies especially at tournaments of tennis or golf, and in 1918, the women's knit one-piece swimsuit appeared. Because of these fashion facts, famous designers of those days entered the sportswear field with the best ready-made clothes; Schiaparelli and Jean Patou obtained excellent results with sportswear utilizing knit.

This period before and after the 1910s was the quickening period of modern fashion, when function and practicality became important and knitwear, including the jersey began to be considered as the best items for women because of its advantages such as lightness, warmth, and the natural silhouette resulting from its elasticity and droppable property. In addition, it had less crinkles than other materials and was easy to produce.

2. Chanel · Jean Patou and Schiaparelli

Representative designers of those days were Paul Poiret, Chanel, Lanvin, Jean Patou, Vionnet, and Schiaparelli, and among these designers Chanel, Jean Patou and Schiaparelli succeeded in applying knit to design.

Firstly, Chanel released work <Picture 1> using a low-priced and practical jersey at her first collection in 1916. By suggesting a suit which had an innovative silhouette for that time, and setting the



<그림 1> G. Chanel's work using jersey, 1916.



<그림 2> G. Chanel's work in the performance 'Le Train bleu', 1924.



<그림 3> G. Chanel's jersey cardigan applying argyle pattern, 1916.



<그림 4> G. Chanel's jersey-pullover with stripe pattern, 1916.



<그림 5> G. Chanel's three-piece suit using jersey, 1929.



<그림 6> G. Chanel's three-piece suit using jersey.

trend with a knit cardigan and jacket, and by encouraging designers to follow her interest in knit, she could rightly be called the pioneer of knit.

Chanel developed the jersey suit with a linear silhouette to cover her tall and skinny body shape, and to show feminine curves. Because the temperate and sporty Chanel clothes were ideal for wartime, women liked her clothes, and manufacturers

imitated her products. In 1917, the American Perry, Dame&Co. sold their mail order customers fit wool jersey clothes almost identical to the one Chanel showed in her collection, sporting a white collar and cuff buttons, at \$2.75.

In 1913, when she opened her first boutique in the resort town of Deauville, what she started with was the desire to make clothes which she would

wear herself, and the need for a new fashion which she obtained while running a hat shop. Therefore, innovative clothes no one had ever made before were displayed at the boutique. The world's first sportswear, a plain and smooth sailor dress, and sweaters for fishermen were a few examples of these. These were simple, casual clothes which contrasted strongly with the famous Poiret's clothes collection.

In 1924, Chanel designed <Picture 2> a costume for the Russian Ballet's *Blue Train*, which was directed by Dyagilev, and the program designed by Picasso. The musical pantomime was set in the vacation season. For its costuming, Chanel designed sportswear worn by Chanel herself during a vacation in Southern France and a sweater sported by the Duke of Windsor. Chanel picked up ideas from life around her or designed things entirely in line with her own tastes, resulting in a truly practical and functional design philosophy. This can be seen in the women's cardigan utilizing a pattern worn in farmhouses in the cold region of Britain <Picture 3> or from a stripe pullover <Picture 4> which was influenced by the clothing of the crew on the yacht 'Flying Cloud', owned by her lover, the Duke of Westminster's. <Picture 5> is the picture of Chanel wearing clothes that was designed for her collection. She is wearing her classic three-piece items, striped and transformed patterned jersey pull-over, cardigan and skirt with pearl necklace that became her trademark. <Picture 6> is another version of the three-piece item. She is wearing an ivory wool jersey shirt, black wool crepe jacket and skirt with long pearl necklace.

Before Schiaparelli became famous as a surrealist designer, she was already an established designer with an atelier on Seine Street in Paris. In 1927, she used elastic wool to make a sweater, re-

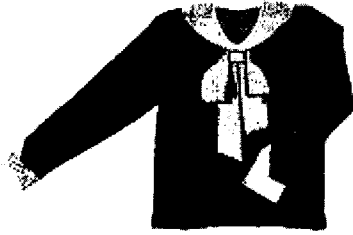
sulting in a design creating an optical illusion through trompe-l'oeil <Picture 7>, thus seizing an opportunity to create her own world. This design is one of the early products mechanically knitted using white and black wool, and its technique is also applied to modern knit design. <Picture 8,9> are in Casharel's F/W collection in 2001, which shows that Schiaparelli's design has survived the test of time very well. In 1928 she opened a sportswear specialty store <Pour Sports>, which gained success with black and white sweaters and colorful neck ties.

Her interests in knit brought about the international success of the 'mad-cap' in 1930. The 'Mad-cap' is a small cap that can be used in a variety of ways by the wearer. Thus, re-analysis of the fun in fashion appeared as a big element in her works; it is interesting to note that its departure point was the designs that utilize knit.

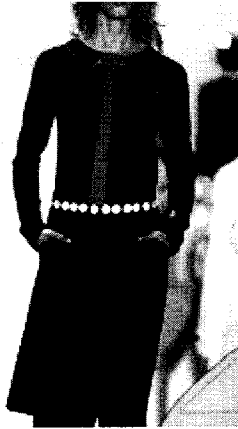
She expresses her sense of individuality by wearing knit jacket, culottes and oversize of globes that had already become her trademark. Her wide pants culottes changed to one-piece wear and the knit jacket changed its patterns to stripes in <Picture 11>. This picture was in the French *Vogue* magazine in 1930.

At the time she was fascinated with surrealism and had a friendship with Dali, Jean Cocteau, and Bellarmine. She drew inspiration from this and expressed it in her work. These unexpected ideas created a sensation in Paris fashion. Representative designs are sweaters with a skull pattern, suits with pockets shaped like a drawer, evening dresses with shrimp and parsley and hats like upside down high heels.

Sports wear design related to sports stars became a new focus of a modernity affected with sports fever, and Jean Patou was its leader. He attached



<그림 7> Schiaparelli's woolen sweater, 1927.



<그림 8> a work using jerey, Cacharel, '01 F/W Paris collection.



<그림 9> a work using jerey, Cacharel, '01 F/W Paris collection.



<그림 10> a picture of Schiaparelli wearing knitted jacket and culotte-skirt, 1930.



<그림 11> Schiaparelli's work using knitted material, 1930.



<그림 12> J. Patou's tennis outfit, 1925.

great importance to sports wear, more so than anyone else. He made a special department for it in his couturier, and his most famous customer was France tennis champion Suzanne Lenglen, who was a Wimbledon champion from 1919 to 1926. He designed court wear and off-court wear for her. She gained popularity by playing with his clothes in 1921. The style in <Picture 12> which featured a

wrinkled one-piece, sleeveless sweater from men's clothes and band on a head, was imitated many times.

Patou also made swimming suits, riding dresses, and ski suits. He opened a shop specialized for sports wear in 1925. He could be considered the most successful designer in 1920s due to his design that combined human engineering-oriented function



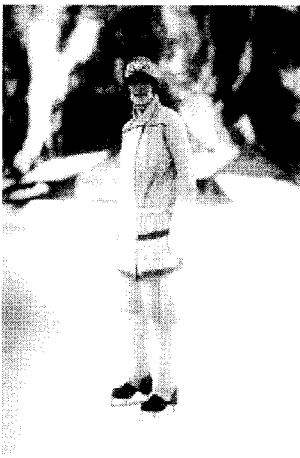
<그림 3> J. Patou's knitted swim-suit with stripe pattern, 1928.



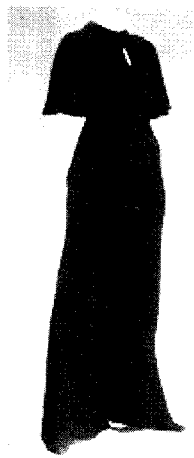
<그림 14> a knitwear for tennis, 1920.



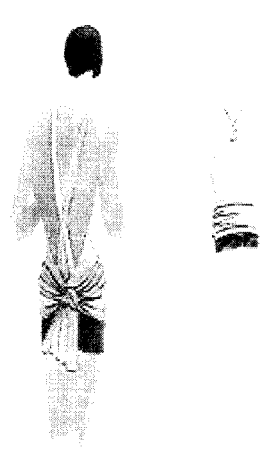
<그림 15> a knitwear for tennis, 1925.



<그림 6> G. Chanel's two-piece suit using knitted material.



<그림 17> J. Patou's work using rayon jersey, 1929.



<그림 18> J. Patou's bathing suit using jersey, 1925.

ality and style. <Picture 13> is a striped knit two-piece swimming wear that he designed in 1928 for the fashion show at the famous Deauville resort in France. He applied refreshing stripes to an upper garment and used a single color for the lower garment for a sense of stability.

IV. Formative Characteristic and Fashion Image of Knit Wear

1. Functionality

The physical characteristics of knit worked as an important element for sports wear with the emergence of sports fashion. A necessary item for tennis or golf, it was soon embraced by the upper class

as it got less crumpled, made actions comfortable and was able to absorb sweat. In addition, people preferred to wear it because of its warming and airing qualities for winter sports like skiing or skating, and its flexible comfort made it suitable for summer sports like swimming or yachting.

Knit wear for golf from the 19th century had a bolder design and patterning and the ailing knit plant in Scotland was given a boost by the appearance of a picture of the Duke of Windsor playing golf while wearing a Fair-Isle sweater at St. Andrew in the U.K in 1922. <Picture 14> and <Picture 15> are the women's knit wear for tennis in 1920 and 1925. It preserves the active image of a tennis player by emphasizing the neckline and shoulder with a deep V-neck and a boat shaped neck and through the use of diverse patterns.

Chanel is enjoying skating in Switzerland in <Picture 16>. She is wearing a knit two-piece with a transformed rib structure through the application of strips. Her dress allowed knit to be recognized as a luxurious material, and upgraded knit to the upper, owing to her position as a famous designer and a fashion leader of the time.

2. Voluptuous characteristic

The women who were released from corsets by Paul Poiret discovered that emphasizing only the breast and waist is not that sensual, and that the natural silhouette of the body is also an important method of expression. As a result, the skill of cutting on the bias was a godsend because it can emphasize the beautiful curves of women's bodies naturally while maintaining comfort at the same time. Knit rapidly became popularized because it can make a woman more charming with its flexibility and drape characteristics due to its structural qual-

ities, as well as having more effect than fabric without special complex cutting and sewing techniques.

<Picture 17> is a black rayon jersey that Jean Patou designed. It is a suit with top and slacks connected and cape. The top emphasizes the breasts and waist using ribs, and slacks and cape were made in a comfortable and feminine form, utilizing a soft transformed structure to show the bodyline naturally. <Picture 18> is an illustration of a jersey bathing suit of Jean Patou designed by applying the drape characteristic of knit at its best.

It was impossible to make clothes fitted to a body and to show the beauty of women's body, and the beauty of curves if it was not knit. Women wanted to show off their body naturally in public places, so displaying their voluptuous curves, made them choose knit which was the logical choice for sports wear, because of its functional aspects.

3. Practicality (economical efficiency)

The practicality of knit wear is owing to gains in productivity, namely that it costs less to weave and it is not difficult to sew.

Before Chanel introduced the jersey as a high-class apparel of Haute Couture, knit was only known as a material for under clothes or other items of warmth. However, the diverse needs of the times required functional clothes; this fact changed the recognition of knit that can be produced at a low price, at a time when commodities were scarce because of the world war. Famous designers actively participated in the development of designs using knit. It was rapidly accepted as a part of fashion because it can make a great silhouette with relatively more simple sewing techniques than other fabrics.

In addition, the weaving machine was developed

such as that which made knit swimming wear in 1930, and rayon technology had progressed enough to utilize it for the latest fashionable material of knit. Finally, it had become possible to make knitwear material luxurious as never before imagined. Furthermore, Chanel invented patterns by applying strips known as argyle and continuously introduced knitwear in her collections, thus allowing the world a chance to discover variety of knit in patterns. In this way, knit that famous designers had added value to spread around the world, America and Europe in particular, where high volume production meant lower prices. Knit jackets and cardigan assumed an important role in women's wardrobes in the 1920s.

V. Conclusion

It is noticeable that knit, which appeared in women fashion in the early 20th century, had settled into such an essential item for modern society in a relatively short time. In such a development process, it seems that the match between the characteristics of knit and the demand of the era figured strongly.

The elimination of corsets by Paul Poiret allowed women's fashion to pursue a natural, comfortable and feminine line. After the Industrial Revolution, women's participation in social activities enabled the feminist movement and changed the social climate, which also saw sports leave the margins of society to found a new field called sports fashion. Then through the First World War, women who needed more practical and functional clothes considered knit not only practical, but also fashionable by witnessing the highest strata of society welcoming Chanel's jersey suit. Then Jean Patou and Schiaparelli, who influenced the 1920s and 1930s along with Chanel, also opened the new field of sports-

wear with knit applied designs, and even at Worth's house recommended the jersey three-piece suit.

As noted previously, knit had come into the spotlight with the feminist movement, sports fever, and the background of world war. The designers who connected these social circumstances with design were Chanel, Jean Patou and Schiaparelli, among others. We found that knit should be appreciated as the most suitable material to satisfy the needs of modern fashion with its own physical quality of flexibility and the formative characteristics of economic efficiency, droppable property, and functionality. Finally we expect that these characteristics of knit will more come into the spotlight with the formative characteristics that modern fashion design requires in the future.

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