



Science-fiction boots by Li Yingjie. Incorporating rivets into the design is a touch that European trends experts have predicted for this autumn-winter season. CREDIT: XXXXXXXXXXXX

Designers in demand

Delhi-based industry research company RNCOS issued a report during the summer that predicted growth for the Chinese footwear industry for at least the next five years, with production growing—in volume and value—by between 5% and 6% each year.

Looking further ahead, the company predicted that, in the course of the next decade, the Chinese industry will need to train or bring in from outside 300,000 new footwear designers.

The former head of the School of Footwear at Leicester College in the UK, Roger Beeby, on hearing this assessment, said Chinese universities and footwear firms should take advantage of the experience of training centres in other parts of the world. He explained that Leicester, for example, offers a one-year intensive course and a two-year foundation degree course, while a three-year footwear design degree is on offer at De Montfort University in the same city.

Chinese students have successfully completed these

courses, Mr Beeby says. There are also many Asian students already attending the footwear design course at the Polimoda school in Florence, another route Chinese companies could go down. And there are many more courses on offer in cities throughout Europe and North America, as well as in other centres of Asian design excellence such as Tokyo.

If the report is accurate, however, Chinese institutions are going to have to increase the number of young people they themselves take in a train for a career in designing shoes; 300,000 is a large number, even for China.

The talent and the appetite among young people to devote themselves to this sector are clearly in place already. A year ago, the China Leather Industry Association launched an initiative that it called 'The Genuine Leather Mark', to offer a measure of authentication for higher quality Chinese shoes. This year, it invited young designers throughout the country to compete for a prize, the Genuine Leather Mark Cup.

At the China International Footwear Fair in Shanghai in September, the association set up an exhibition to show off some of the competition entries, and there was plenty of originality and creative spirit on display.

Among the first pieces to catch the eye was a pair of sandals with a five-centimetre heel, made from pink and green leather. They are by a designer named Liu Jianhua, who has used the two colours in a double ankle-strap with strawberry motifs in pink patent on the inner and outer heel, and spangly pink and silver hearts on a strap at the base of the toe.

There were also some entrancing children's shoe designs, for example a pair of sunflower-themed flip-flop clogs on a foam sole by Guoyun. Also on a clog theme, there were some round-toed shoes by a young designer named Hang Qing, which have a fold-down rabbit-fur trim that will turn the clogs into boots if you wear the trim up.

Li Yunyun presented to the competition some lace-up children's boots with puppet-theatre window decorations in textiles on the outside. But the offering of namesake Li Yingjie seemed to stretch the 'Genuine Leather Mark' theme with a pair of science-fiction metal effect boots, with rivets on display on the outside, in keeping with a design element that Nicoline van Enter of Y Trends predicted last year.

These are only a handful of the examples of design talent that were on show. Finding 300,000 bearers of



Footwear design schools around the world have already trained many talented, young Chinese creators—they can make an important contribution towards helping the industry there meet its innovation needs. CREDIT: XXXXXXXXXXXX

such talent will be difficult, even if the Chinese industry has ten years in which to find them, but the Genuine Leather Mark Cup idea deserves success. It's evident from this exercise that there is no lack of inspiration. 🌐