

Getting off on the right foot

Shoe company maintains popularity for more than 150 years

By YU NAN
China Daily staff

An old Beijing saying goes, "step in shoes by Neiliansheng and you will see good fortune at your job." But despite the fame that has lasted for 150 years, the old Beijing shoe company is facing increasing challenges from consumers that want Italian leather pumps or a pair of Nikes.

The Neiliansheng shoe store, however, which has specialized in making cloth shoes since 1853, has refused to be squeezed out by the competition and has become one of the few successful surviving local brands in Beijing.

In the last three years, sales of Neiliansheng cloth shoes have increased by 20 per cent each year. Last year saw its total output reach 100,000 pairs of shoes, 10 times the average in the mid-1980s, said company president Cheng Laixiang.

Even though each pair of shoes cost at least 90 yuan (US\$11), nearly five times more than other popular brands, demand still exceeds supply.

"Calls pour in all day to ask for shoes," said Cheng. "But in order to keep up the high quality of our shoes, we are very careful about the speeding up of production. Everything should be done cautiously to protect the fame of the old brand," he added.

Shoeing royal families

Founded during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) by Zhao Ting, the shop bears an auspicious name which means, "unstoppable promotions in official ranks" in Chinese.

The company quickly won many customers and before long Neiliansheng gained a good reputation for making court boots for top officials. Its shoes had even served as tributes to royal families.

The court shoes were sought after for their bright black satin and the 32 layers of cloth used in the sole. Wearing the court shoes of Neiliansheng soon became a fashion statement in Beijing and a mark of high status.

In addition to their shoes' quality, the services the company offered also drew customers. In those days workers personally went to the homes of high officials to take measurements, but owner Zhao believed it was inconvenient and decided to write down all the names, addresses, measurements and special demands of local officials who had shoes made to save time.

When officials needed shoes, they just sent a messenger to tell the store and later to pick them up. This service also allowed people to give of-

ficials shoes as presents.

The old records were compiled into a history book called "Luzhong Beizai (Shoe Data Memorandum)," which is still kept at the store as a record of that time period.

But the skill of making court shoes has gone by the wayside said company president Cheng.

"It is a pity that no one in Neiliansheng can make court shoes now. Its old technique was lost as the craftsmen passed away."

While officials favoured Neiliansheng shoes, they were also popular among common people.

Zhao Ting once said that both the people sitting in the sedans and the people bearing the sedans should be served.

He designed a special kind of shoe for sedan-chair bearers called *saxie*. The shoes were soft and moulded to the foot and were good at absorbing sweat.

"They could be regarded as the earliest Chinese sneakers," Cheng said. "People who practice Chinese kung fu like to wear this kind of shoe."

Saxie are still popular among old Beijingers as leisure shoes.

After the founding of new China, many Chinese leaders including Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping also wore the cloth shoes of Neiliansheng.

Quality the priority

Neiliansheng's fame can be attributed to its values of providing quality products. Making a multi-layer sole takes seven steps. Stitched by thin linen threads, the soles are made of 100 per cent white cotton.

The cloth should be rinsed and starched, then workers steam, overlap and stitch the cloth into soles. The last step is hammering in designs using certain moulds.

Each square of sole requires at least 81 stitches, so making a pair of soles requires about 5,000 stitches, Cheng said. The sole made under such processes is more comfortable than those made of leather and it will not deform or crack, he added.

Its adherence to traditional methods is the main reason for its demand and high price, but that has also proven an obstacle for the company's expansion.

"One fastest shoemaker can make only two pairs of shoes in a whole day under such strict production rules," Cheng said. "But quality is the life of Neiliansheng, creating lower quality shoes to pursue output means committing suicide. We never think about that."

Xu Erqi, 48, is the oldest



Sole survivor: The 100-plus-year-old Neiliansheng shoe store in Beijing is struggling to maintain its precious traditions.

shoemaker at Neiliansheng. "Almost all the old generation shoemakers at Neiliansheng have passed away and the few of them who are still alive are not able to make shoes any more, so some special techniques to make antique shoes are now lost," said Xu.

Only several pairs of *da yuner xie*, thick cotton shoes specially made for elderly people in the winter are now available in the shop. No new pairs will be made because the only artisan who knew how to make them passed away, Xu said.

In recent years Neiliansheng has recorded detailed production steps to avoid losing more techniques, and they have trained young workers to carry on old methods.

But Xu said it is hard to find young workers who want to learn the difficult techniques.

"Maybe most young people nowadays cannot stand the life

working with needles, awls and said Xu, adding monthly salary of about 1,000 yuan (US\$110), which is not very high compared to other shoemakers in Beijing.

Besides stitching shoes, Xu also supervises the process.

"Just reading a book cannot make one a qualified shoemaker; long-time teaching and practice is needed," Xu said.

Entering a new era

Cheng said it is the company's strategy that has kept it alive today. For example, the company created several new patterns of cloth shoes to match modern fashions in the two years that he has run the company.

By successfully combining new designs with traditional techniques Neiliansheng has maintained its popularity among Chinese people.

"Now people care more about the health and comfort of their feet than the shoes' appearance when choosing shoes," said one salesman in Neiliansheng who sells cloth shoes to taxi drivers and professionals who wear them to relax.

Life-long Neiliansheng wearers like 70-year-old Yu Shouzhong of Beijing cringe when they think of binding their feet in lace-ups or stuffing them in tight stiff leather shoes.

"Neiliansheng's shoes are nice and cool in the summer and they don't pinch my feet," said Yu. "In the winter, I wear thicker ones with fleece inside, they are even warmer than leather boots."

Cheng is now looking at expanding his shoes to a new shore.

"We're thinking about targeting the Chinatowns in the United States and Europe. There are a lot of people who stock up on the shoes when they visit China," he said.

TODAY'S RADIO

FM 87.6 MHz (all stereo)	FM 90.0 MHz (all stereo)
10:30 Movie World	08:00 Auto CD
14:30 Celebrity of the Century	09:30 Chinese songs by popular singers
15:00 Grand Theatre	11:50 Music
17:00 New Folk Songs	12:00 Happy 30 Minutes
20:30 Music Dinner	17:00 Radio songs
FM 97.4 MHz (all stereo)	AM 603 kHz
08:30 Music World	07:00 News
11:00 Pop 2002	08:30 Reading Time
13:00 World Classic Concert	10:00 Community & Life
15:00 Music Saloon	18:00 Travel Guide
20:30 Beautiful Life	20:10 English pop songs
22:30 New Music Magazine	

TODAY'S TELEVISION

CCTV-1 Channel 2	22:43 Midnight Theatre
11:20 Chinese Ethnic Groups	CCTV-9
17:00 World Express	14:00 Financial Report
19:00 News; Weather	15:30 Around China
20:05 Serial: Breakthrough (7)	17:00 Headline News
23:06 Sports: World Cup Special (33)	18:15 Shanghai Today
00:21 Modern Workers	20:15 Kung fu
00:51 Documentary: Pole to Pole Expedition	BTV-1 Channel 6
CCTV-2 Channel 8	12:30 Capital Economy Report
15:30 Shopping	17:25 Stock Market
16:05 Art Investment Guide	18:30 News; Weather
17:25 Oriental Horizon	19:53 Serial: Journey of Love (3)
19:35 China Financial Report	20:49 Record
21:00 Earth Stories	BTV-2 Channel 21
21:25 Economy 30 Minutes	17:04 World Watch
CCTV-3 Channel 15	18:20 Chinese Top Music
13:07 Behind the Scene	19:07 Entertainment Live
16:20 Wonderful Time	21:48 World Music
18:30 Elementary Art	22:46 Concert Hall
20:33 World of Love	BTV-3 Channel 27
21:03 Dream Theatre	12:25 Impression
22:40 News	17:35 Serial: The Court (9)
CCTV-4 Channel 32	18:30 Modern English
16:50 Programmes for the Elderly	18:55 Discovery Channel
17:50 About Taiwan	19:30 Science and Technology
19:30 Chinese Art	20:05 Gourmets Gala
20:30 Across the Straits	21:00 News
21:00 China News	BTV-4 Channel 17
CCTV-6 Channel 18	18:00 630 Theatre: Chinese Restaurants (7)
14:07 Australian movie	18:35 Movie Saloon
18:31 Documentary: Sound of Music	19:10 Entertainment Live
19:45 Chinese movie	19:45 Serial: The Story (9, 10)
21:29 World Screen	21:38 Serial: The Story of Ah Q (3, 4)
21:52 US movie	BTV-7 Channel 24
CCTV-8 Channel 29	12:35 Specialist Clinic
19:00 Animal World	18:35 Digital Life
19:35 Studio Express	19:35 Modern Times
20:00 Serial: Deeply In Love (7, 8)	20:30 Luxury & Elegance
	21:05 Delicacy

BRIDGE (By Phillip Alder)

journalist, wrote: now and then there is a person born who is so unlucky that he runs into accidents which started out to happen to somebody else.

In many parts of the world, the number 13 is considered unlucky. And the problem in today's deal, which features a grand slam, is to work out both how to play correctly and which card should win trick 13 if you misplay at trick one.

Note that South must ask for aces, although he knows the answer, before asking for kings. Also, South's last bid is a gamble justifiable only with success.

After West leads the heart jack, you should win in hand with the heart ace. Then you draw trumps, unblock the ace-queen of diamonds, play a heart to dummy's king, and jettison your club losers on the king-jack of diamonds. You win six spades, two hearts, four diamonds and one club.

Now suppose you erroneously win trick one in the dummy. You play off six

from the dummy), the heart ace and the diamond queen with dummy's king and cash the diamond jack. It is trick 12. Assuming East has a diamond left, you play the club jack to your ace and lead the club four. But if West has discarded accurately, he will win the trick with his seven — unlucky.

West	North	East	South
♠ 10 4	♠ 7 6 5 3	♠ 7 6 4 3 2	♠ A K Q J 9 8
♥ J 10 9 5	♥ K Q	♥ 10 8 7 5	♥ A
♦ 9 6 2	♦ K J 4 3	♦ K Q 9	♦ A Q
♣ 7 6 5 3	♣ J 10 8		♣ A 4 2

Dealer: South
Vulnerable: East-West

South	West	North	East
2 ♠	Pass	2 NT	Pass
3 ♣	Pass	4 ♣	Pass
4 NT	Pass	5 ♣	Pass
5 NT	Pass	6 ♣	Pass
7 ♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

Opening lead: ♥ J

CROSSWORD (No 6631)

ACROSS

- DJ albums
- Swimsuit piece
- Geodesic
- Island near Java
- Poetic adverb
- Sheriff
- Taylor's kid
- Cup d'
- Cloub stint
- Hit on the head
- Pickpocket
- Cubbyholes
- Poultry buy
- Jesse of track
- Droop
- Fed a line
- Kind of slipper
- Sour
- Not obliged
- Soul singer
- Redding
- Early garden?
- Naughty
- Drip-dry fabric
- Rowboat need
- Stonehenge
- priest
- 44 Conscious
- 46 Occupy the throne
- 48 Author's need
- 50 French I verb
- 51 Grace ender
- 52 Baseball stat
- 53 Heavy metal
- 54 Fabricated
- 27 LP
- 55 Sound-barrier successors
- 28 Males
- 29 Ear of corn
- 30 Actress
- Hagen
- 31 Full of holes
- 32 Ancient Tokyo
- 33 Lucy Lawless role
- 35 Tribal council
- 37 Greek "N"
- 38 "Holy cats!"
- 39 Roy Rogers movie, e.g.
- 40 Vast assortment
- 41 Tall grass
- 43 Artist Magritte
- 44 Fuse together
- 46 Flow into
- 47 Actress
- 48 Truman
- 49 Natalie's father

DOWN

- Shop machine
- No-frills
- Locality
- Entreat
- Stopped the horse
- Light bulb filler
- Quay
- Pouched animal
- Hr. part
- Starfield cry
- Jo's sister
- Cold and rainy
- Bone (Lat.)
- Itty-bitty
- Matterhorn
- Obtain

Solution to No 6630

L	A	M	A	R	F	J	A	W	S
E	V	I	L	Z	O	O	L	E	O
T	E	A	M	S	T	E	R	K	O
C	H	I	N	C	O	R	E	R	
P	E	N	D	Z	I	P	J	A	R
U	R	N	A	T	O	M	S	E	G
S	O	S	T	E	N	A	D	O	S
B	O	D	E	S	P	I	G	S	
I	O	W	A	N	L	E	O		
M	B	A	S	V	O	Y	A	G	E
P	I	K	E	R	E	D	I	T	
S	E	E	D	E	R	R	E	S	P

WHAT'S ON

Acrobatic Show

Chaoyang Theatre is a theatre which specializes in acrobatics all the year round. Many top acrobatic artists from all over the country are invited to perform for the Chinese and foreign tourists.

Venue: Chaoyang Theatre, 36 Dongsanban Beilu, Chaoyang District, Beijing
Time: 7:15 pm, nightly
Telephone: 6507-2421, 6507-1818

STAGE

Joyful jugglers:

The China Acrobatic Troupe stages a nightly variety show at the Tiandi Theatre, where the seemingly impossible is made real.

Spinning plates, juggling umbrellas, contortionists and acrobats fill the air. Integrating superlative juggling, unicycling, balancing and jumping through hoops with the finest ancient Chinese dancing, the star-studded cast will amaze.

Time: 7:15 pm, daily
Place: 10 Dongzhimen Nandajie, Chaoyang District
Tel: 6502-3984

Original dance drama:

"The Passions and Regrets in Yuanmingyuan," an original Chinese dance drama produced last year, will be restaged.

Presented by 100-plus dancers, the drama tells a tragic love story from Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). The drama created the first image of a eunuch on the Chinese stage.

Time: 7:30 pm, July 3
Place: Poly Theatre
Tel: 6506-5345

Absurd theatre:

An absurd comedy called "Can I Be Easy?" is being shown in Beijing to reflect

social abuses in Taiwan.

The play is the latest creation of dramatists Ding Nai-chu and Lai Sheng-chuan (Stan Lai) from Taiwan who founded the Performance Workshop, a private-owned theatre, in Beijing.

Time: 7:15 pm until July 8
Place: Small playhouse of Beijing People's Art Theatre
Tel: 6525-0123

Kung fu show:

"Hidden Dragon, Crouching Tiger," a performance which demonstrates the best of the mysterious Chinese kung fu, is being staged at the Xinrong Theatre in Beijing.

The show displays brilliant Chinese martial arts within the structure of a dramatic story. Presented by the Beijing Detian Shunyi Culture Development Company, the performance is aimed at entertaining the increasing number of international travelers in Beijing.

Borrowing the best from modern dance, the show will amaze audiences with dazzling kung fu skills such as bare-handed practice, one-on-one fighting and weapons practice.

Time: 7:30 pm, daily
Place: 16 Baizhifanglu, Xuanwu District
Tel: 8354-0774, 8354-0775

Monkey King:

Two Peking Opera excerpts, one focusing on the Monkey King, are being performed every evening at the Zhengyici Theatre.

"The Broken Bridge" and "Eighteen Arhats Fight the Monkey King" are featured on Fridays.

On Saturdays, there will be "Picking up the Jade Bracelet" and "Havoc in the Dragon's Palace."

two concerts under the baton of Joseph Primavera at the Century Theatre.

Founded in 1939, the Philadelphia Youth Orchestra is one of the oldest youth orchestras in the country. The 86 musicians in the current season were selected by competitive audition, and range in age from 10 to 21.

The programmes include Mozart's Overture of La Clemenza di Tito, Walter Fiston's Symphony No 2, Schubert's Symphony No 9 in C major and two Chinese pieces. One is (erhu)-musical symphony "Moon Spring," and the other is Ma Sitsung's "Lingling for Home."

Time: 7:30 pm
Place: Century Theatre
Tel: 6554-6666

EXHIBITIONS

Antique calligraphy:

An exhibition of paintings and rks donated by scholar Zhuo is on at the Palace Museum.

Shangwu family with a rich cultural background devoted his life to studying antiques and calligraphy works. The exhibition features a total of 120 alligraphy works and gathered from the donated to museums in province and the Palace Museum.

Time: 9 am-5 pm until July 3
Place: The Forbidden City
Tel: 6513-2255

Mask vs Face:

A new group exhibition "Mask vs Face" is on at the Red Gate Gallery. It features more than 30

works by 16 young artists from different parts of China, such as Wang Jinsong, Tammy Wong, and Cang Xin. Their works vary from oil painting to sculpture, from photo to video, but all focus on the artists' own or others' faces and examine the complex relations between masks and faces.

Time: 10 am-5 pm until July 14 except Mondays
Place: Red Gate Gallery, Dongbianmen Watchtower, Chongwenmen
Tel: 6525-1005

Focus:

A solo painting exhibition presents a series of haunting head shots 1.8 metre high covered with her own signature materials of cotton balls, human hair and braided twine.

Time: 9 am-5 pm until July 31
Place: 95 Donghuanmen Dajie
Tel: 6526-8882

Precious coins:

A perennial exhibition of ancient coins is on show at the Ancient Coin Museum in the Deshengmen Tower on the North Second Ring Road.

About 10,000 ancient coins are displayed, including early shellfish coins and silver coins of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

China was one of the first countries to make and use coins, some of which date back more than 3,000 years.

An exchange market for ancient coins is situated outside the museum and free appraisal by experts is offered.

Time: 9 am-4 pm daily except Monday
Place: Deshengmen Jianlou, Xicheng District
Tel: 6201-8073