

SPORTS

## Skateboard culture, Made in China

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*Skateboard culture is going mainstream in East Asia, winning over new consumers and redefining social norms in the process. Image credit: Gucci*

By [Glyn Atwal](#)

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The Gucci Cruise 2024 collection presented in the South Korean capital, Seoul, on May 16, cemented the mainstream arrival of skate culture in East Asia.

The 1990s-inspired collection showcased an array of surfboards and skateboards donned as accessories alongside baggy skate-style trousers and oversized maxi skirts presented on runway.

In recent years, brands have been taking cues from local communities. All across the continent, it is clear that grunge is back, and skate culture is on the rise a trend that is especially evident in China.

The unmistakable sound of wheels rolling at SMP Guangzhou Skatepark, the world's largest facility of this type, is an undeniable reminder that skateboarding is no longer limited to a niche community.

Asia Pacific is projected to be the [fastest-growing region in the skateboard market](#).

The distinctive appeal of skate culture is attracting new fans, according to Renton Millar, former World Cup Vert Champion who has coached regularly in China.

"It's a great sport/art form," he said. "It's fun to do, very challenging and social. It's a sport, as well as an art. It has its own culture and can be competitive or you can do it for yourself."

[Skateboarding in China](#) has traditionally been a subculture reserved for those "in the know." As skateboard culture in the nation goes mainstream, it is winning over new consumer segments, redefining subcultural norms in the process.

Sporting status and lifestyle allure

One segment attracted to skate culture is consumers who value skateboarding as a performance sport.

Skateboarding achieved global sporting status with its Olympic debut at the Tokyo 2020 Games, and it is expected to be a high-profile event at Paris 2024.

Sports brands such as Nike have established strong associations with skateboarding that focus on performance. A

potential game-changer is the emergence of domestic sportswear brands such as Anta, which have started launching skateboarding lines.

The pandemic has heightened interest in **outdoor activities**, encouraging many Chinese individuals to take up skateboarding as a lifestyle activity.

Athleisure brands such as Lululemon are diversifying their product ranges to cater to the growing popularity of skateboarders who view skateboarding as a fun way to stay fit.

**Prestige power: Luxury brand collaborations**

Brands rooted in skate culture such as Supreme and Palace continue to enjoy in-group streetwear status, simultaneously expanding the market for Chinese labels. Luxury brand collaborations with skate brands show no signs of slowing down.

Luxury consumers, although mostly not active skateboarders themselves, seek a luxury lifestyle that embraces exclusivity and individuality.

High-profile collaborations such as **Palace x Gucci** and Palace x Rimowa appeal to a luxury target audience that might otherwise not be exposed to real skate culture.

As Elisa Harca, cofounder and Asia CEO of Red Ant Asia, observes, "The movement market continuously reinvents itself, offering brands a unique opportunity to create immersive experiences that go beyond superficial engagement. By tapping into this movement, brands can fully immerse themselves, embrace the culture, and activate connections on multiple levels, resulting in substantial returns on investment."

**Cultural relevance**

Skateboarding may have its roots in American culture, but a hybrid cultural identity is emerging in China. This is evident not only at the product level, with Nike collaborating with Chinese skate label Fly to launch **SB Dunk Low Fly Streetwear** adorned with Chinese calligraphy, but also in brands' efforts to create stronger emotional connections that celebrate Chinese identity.

For example, Vans China skate team showcases local talent in its latest film, G2963.

Skateboarding continues to embody self-expression, but it is shedding its original "edgy" image.

In China, skate culture has transformed from a subculture into a sport and fashion status symbol.

The popularization of skateboarding in China has made it easier than ever for consumers to physically engage with various aspects of the sport. In Shanghai, the **Avenue & Son's flagship store** at Taikoo Li Qiantan is integrated with the brand's street-structure skate park.

**Celebrity influence and future elite skaters**

The growing popularity of skate culture in China could soon have the potential to shake up mainstream culture. A significant factor will be the growing appeal of elite skaters.

International stars such as British-Japanese Sky Brown, who won a bronze medal at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics at just 13 years old, is a brand ambassador for **Tag Heuer**. She currently stars in Volvo's "**For Life**" campaign.

Although Miss Brown's media presence in China is limited, her success in Paris 2024 could prominently elevate her global status.

If China can produce a skateboarding equivalent of **Eileen Gu**, there will be nothing to stop the sport from trending up. As Mr. Millar notes, the future of skate culture is set to take off.

"It is big," he said. "It is just developing. There are great skaters in China, they are very disciplined. I think there will be some world beaters coming. The skateparks are very good, and there is an industry as well as a population to sustain it."

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