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High value products and innovation needed to compete

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By William C. Pao The China Post

An Italian scholar said yesterday the textile industries of his country and Taiwan shared similar challenges and could learn from each other.

Carlo Pietrobelli, economics professor of Universita degli Studi Roma Tre, made the remarks at Textile International Forum and Exhibition 2005, a three-day event where some of the latest issues facing the industry were discussed.

Pietrobelli said Italy has long been a major textile exporter, designing, manufacturing and selling high-quality products across the globe under world-famous brands.

However, the Italian textile industry is now facing a dilemma -- the rise of mainland China, India and other developing nations as major textile production bases. The elimination of a quotas system, meanwhile, has allowed an increase of Chinese exports to the United States and the European Union.

While certain Italian companies were unaffected -- "Armani will always be Armani," Pietrobelli said -- others, especially those targeting the lower end of the market, have suffered. "A lot of them have shut down their operations," he said.

This is where innovation and high-value products come in. Only by making products that target specific niches in the market and stress values and functionality can manufacturers find a way out of this dilemma, he said.

Government assistance and cooperation between academic institutes and the private sector are also needed to boost Italy's textile industry, he said.

In his view, Italy and Taiwan are facing the same dilemma. In fact, Pietrobelli has written a book called "The Global Challenge to Industrial Districts: Sites in Italy and Taiwan," in which he drew comparisons between the Italian and Taiwanese textile industries.

"Taiwan has done pretty well in developing international linkages, entering into international value chain. These are important in the face of globalization," he said.



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