

# Taiwan Textile Makers Create a High-Tech Niche

By LIN YANG

TAIPEI — Jason Chen knows how it feels when globalization threatens a family business.

In 1992, he went to mainland China to find inexpensive raw materials for his garment and blanket business in Taiwan, following his competitors in the textile industry as they rushed to the mainland for free land, inexpensive labor and loose environmental regulations.

But when a shipment of cloth he bought proved to be defective, his client rejected his garments and he lost about \$100,000. It was enough to push him to take matters into his own hands, and he founded Singtex Industrial to focus on developing higher-value, waterproof synthetic cloth.



JUSTIN GUARIGLIA FOR THE INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE

“When you go cheap, you have no good quality control,” he said. “Many of us went to China for a new, sweet beginning but tasted only bitterness in the end.”

Singtex’s story parallels the transformation of the textile industry in Taiwan over the last two decades. Once the main pillar of Taiwan’s economic development, textiles have given

Singtex Industries, which helped generate Taiwan’s textile sector revival, uses special processes to make fabrics for athletic clothing.

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way to high-technology gadgets and components. Fabric mills and garment factories moved offshore during the last 20 years to focus on lower costs and higher volumes.

Yet the industry has re-emerged over the last 15 years, with companies spinning out a plethora of high-technology fabrics that are being snapped up by European and North American brands. Those materials are used in products like ski jackets, sports jerseys, outdoor

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