Five key trends in world textile and apparel trade

16 October 2015 | By: Dr Sheng Lu

According to statistics released last month (September 2015) by the World Trade Organization (WTO), five important patterns emerged in world textile and apparel trade from 2013 to 2014. Dr Sheng Lu, assistant professor in the Department of Fashion and Apparel Studies at the University of Delaware, takes a closer look.

1: World textile and apparel trade is growing more slowly

Specifically, the value of world textile exports reached $314bn in 2014, up 2.7% from 2013; meanwhile, world apparel exports totalled $483bn, up 5.0% from a year earlier. However, this growth rate is not only one of the lowest since recovery from the 2008 financial crisis in 2010, but is also much lower than the pre-crisis level, which averaged 8.4% for textiles and 10.2% for apparel during the period from 2002-2007.
2: Asia continues to gain more momentum in world textile and apparel trade

In 2014, about 60% of world textile AND apparel exports came from Asia. At the same time, Asian countries together accounted for 31% of world textile imports and 16% of world apparel imports by value. With the continuing growth in income of local consumers, Asia is expected to account for more market share in world apparel imports in the years ahead.

3: China's textile and apparel exports are NOT losing competitiveness

Despite growing concerns about China's rising labour cost and worsening economy, data shows that China's market share in world textile exports reached a new historical height of 35.6% in 2014, up from 34.8% in 2013. China's market share in world apparel...
exports remained at 38.6% in 2014, the same as a year earlier.
4: Textile and apparel trade remains largely regional-based...

...Especially in Asia, Europe and America (including North, South and Central America). Three specific intra-regional trade flows are worth watching: one is Asian countries' growing dependence on textile supply from within the region, which rose to 90.2% in 2014 from 87.7% in 2000. The second is Europe's stable intra-regional trade pattern both for textiles and apparel. In 2014, 58.8% of the EU's (28 members) textile imports and 46.2% of apparel imports came from other EU members; at the same time, 68.8% of the EU's (28 members) textile exports and 74.7% of apparel exports also went to other EU members. Additionally, 80.3% of American countries' textile imports still came from within the region in 2014; at the same time, 88.9% of American countries' apparel exports were also shipped to the region, mostly the United States and Canada as the final consumption market.
5: More "Made in USA" textiles and apparel are sold internationally

From 2013 to 2014, US textile and apparel exports increased 3.2% and 4.3% respectively. Indeed, from 2000 to 2014, the value of US textile and apparel exports increased by 18% and 30% respectively. This is in contrast with just 1.9% annual growth rate for textile exports and negative growth of 9.2% for apparel exports during the period of 2001 to 2007. Close to 73% of US textile exports and 67% of US apparel exports went to North, South and Central America in 2014, suggesting the growing popularity of the western-hemisphere supply chain is an important factor behind the expansion of "Made in USA" textile and apparel exports.