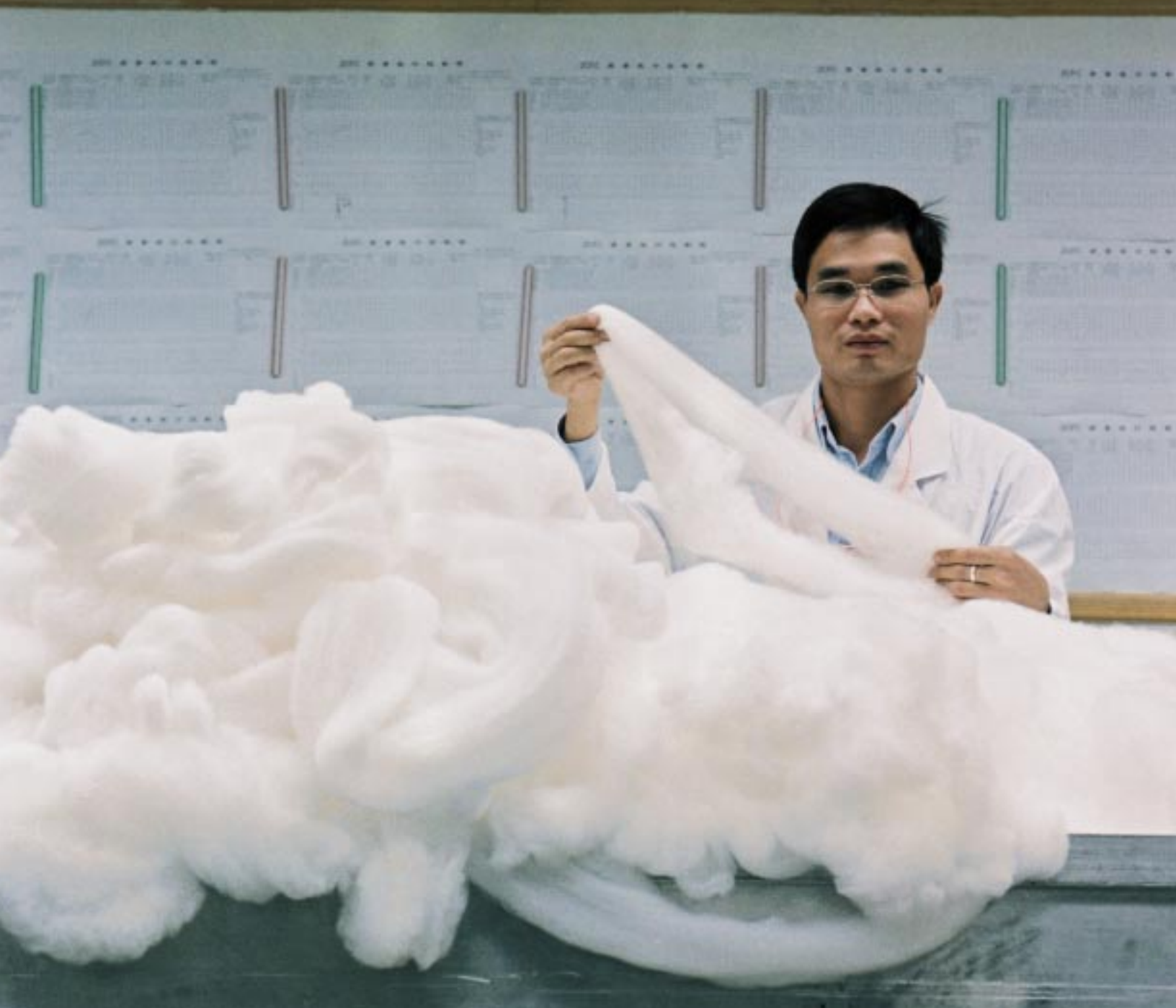




质量统计控制





Chinese filters

“Celanese has always manufactured the premier raw material for cigarette filters – cellulose acetate tow. The question was whether we could successfully access the potential of the largest market in the world through joint venture manufacturing facilities in China. We are pleased to report that acetate is the number one filter choice in China as it is in the rest of the world, and business prospects for the future are looking good,” says Ron Norman, Head of the joint venture plant in Zhuhai, China.

Three Chinese joint ventures

The Chinese government put out feelers in the early 1980s to the various acetate manufacturers with the purpose of finding a joint venture partner to build an acetate tow plant in China. Celanese was the successful negotiator and the seed was sown for what has become an extremely fruitful partnership. By the time the first joint venture contract was signed in 1987, Celanese

was already providing substantial quantities of acetate tow from its U.S., Canadian, and Mexican plants.

The first project began with a plant in Nantong, close to Shanghai, which commenced production of acetate tow in 1989. Acetate flake production, the raw material for tow, was added in 1994. Since then, the site has been expanded several times through the addition of new



machines and de-bottlenecking. Two additional acetate tow plants were established in Kunming and Zhuhai in 1995. And recently, Celanese and its joint venture partner China National Tobacco Corporation completed a feasibility study for further expansion of all three sites. “We’ve been successful here and we continue to be successful. The return on investment is good, and the future looks bright,” says Ron Norman, General Manager of the plant in the new economic development zone in Zhuhai. “Our success is the result of a mutually beneficial partnership. Since our partner, the China National Tobacco Corporation, is also our customer, this is a captive market, but quality is still very important. We just have the traditional manufacturing challenges of making a quality product, making as much as we can, and reducing costs.”

Trade for technology

Also contributing to Celanese’s success are trade-for-technology agreements signed concurrently with the joint venture contracts. According to this arrangement, partially in exchange for pro-

viding the technology which was used to set up the joint ventures, Celanese has been the trading partner for large quantities of tow required to fill the gap between local demand and domestic production. “Thus, we have been able to reach a relationship which guarantees trading volumes, and that has been very important over the years,” says Norman.

Initially, Celanese had enough surplus equipment left over after ceasing the U.S. production of tri-acetate fibers to equip the sites. But as one expansion followed the other, further equipment became necessary. Most of this was sourced domestically, taking advantage of the substantially lower cost of locally produced components. Some equipment continues to be manufactured outside China because domestic technology is not yet established and, of course, some technology is proprietary.

Cultural blending

Celanese’s achievements in China would not have been possible without a high degree of cultural



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1. Quality control in Zhuhai - not all the acetate tow makes it to the customer - and not everyone is permitted to take photographs.

2. Cellulose acetate is mixed with acetone before it goes on to be filtered at high temperature. Only then is it ready for extrusion.

3. Chinese and U.S. managers rotate at the joint venture sites. Ron Norman is currently General Manager of the Zhuhai plant.

4. Ron Norman attaches great importance to the look of the site. "It is hard to quantify but the housekeeping and appearance of the

site are important to quality. It goes with the mind-set. You come here and it's spotless and things are polished. It goes along with doing

things right on target and right on spec. It doesn't cost much more but it sure makes a difference to attitudes."

blending. "Aside from traditional challenges, the biggest is blending the cultures," says Norman. "We find we share end-objectives – that is to say we want to reward investors; we want to have employees who are challenged and happy to work here and we want to pay them well; we want to take care of the environment and have a safe place to work; and we want customers to be happy and to want our product. But as managers we must understand that we can't always see eye-to-eye on how to get there, and this is especially true when you have a blend of cultures as in the case of the U.S. and China. One of our contributions is to introduce western management techniques to the joint venture organization, but in the end management is a blend of both cultures."

Norman cites jobs as an example. "It is part of the Chinese culture to want to create jobs, regardless of whether it is efficient to do so. This is an issue which we sometimes struggle with in our management meetings. But at the end of the day, it's the success of the venture which counts. Our China joint ventures are very efficient – downtimes and yields are very impressive – really enviable num-

bers. We're also finding that good ideas are being generated which we can transfer to other plants." Celanese Acetate expects the Chinese acetate tow market to grow at around an average 1.5% per year in the 2001-2006 period. That growth could be significantly higher if acetate continues to replace polypropylene filters which now account for about 20% of the filter market in China. This compares favorably with western Europe, where growth is expected to be only a minimal 0.5%, and North America, where the market is actually shrinking. The outlook in the rest of the Asia-Pacific region also remains solid and growth is anticipated to be around 2%, but the sheer size of the Chinese market makes it the most attractive country to invest in.

Success in China has been and will continue to be an important element of the Celanese Acetate strategy. ◀