

# 農友種苗的西瓜外交

## It's Great to Have Known-You!

有機會到訪緬甸的民眾，必然對此地婦女頂著切片西瓜在豔陽下販售的景象印象深刻。再仔細一嚐，碩大、汁多、味甜的緬甸西瓜，滋味竟與世界知名的台灣西瓜相差無幾！

其實，高達90%的緬甸西瓜，都是不折不扣的台灣品種，而教導當地貧農轉種瓜果等高經濟作物、每年至少為緬甸增加3,000萬美元外匯收入的幕後功臣，就是來自台灣的農友種苗公司。

在農業人口超過7成的緬甸，除了一望無際的稻田外，田野間最常出現的景觀，就是星羅棋布的高架茅草屋。這種以木材為柱、樹藤為板，茅草為頂的簡陋草屋，不但缺水、缺電，既不耐風又一定漏雨，卻是當地最普及的「國民住宅」，也是緬甸農民困窘生活的真實寫照。

當所有外商紛紛相中緬甸的廉價勞工，期待在即將開放的市場中大顯身手，卻少有人能從社會關懷的角度思索緬甸的未來。而長期致力於改善緬甸農民生活的農友種苗公司，則是極少數例外。

### 在還填不飽肚子的年代，引進經濟作物的概念

1968年成立的農友種苗公司，由成功培育台灣第一顆無子西瓜的「西瓜大王」陳文郁創辦。包括國人熟知的聖女小蕃茄、天蜜洋香瓜，以及數不清的西瓜品種，皆出自該公司的種苗培育團隊。

農友至今擁有六萬多個來自世界各國的蔬果種原，其中光是西瓜一項，即蒐集了上千種野生品種，甚至可依不同國家的口味「訂製專屬西瓜」。

目前農友已研發出近300種西瓜品種，產量約占全球西瓜種子市場的1/4，行銷足跡更遍及五十多國。

在新加坡、泰國、大陸福建、越南、印度、印尼等地，皆設立分公司的農友，早在1994年，即開始在緬甸進行採種工作，其後發現，擁有廣大沖積平

原的緬甸，土壤肥沃、氣候溫和且雨水充沛，相當適合培育瓜果，因此鎖定緬甸為經營據點。

不過，要在實行計畫經濟制度的緬甸，推動栽種高經濟作物並不容易，因為軍政府向來強硬規定農地的作物種類，以「能填飽肚子」的稻米和雜糧為首選，根本很難找到多餘的空地種植其他作物。

「早年我去和緬甸的農業部長溝通，希望他能協助我們找地時，卻只得到一句『沒吃飯會餓死，沒吃水果又不會死！』的冷漠回應。」談及軍政府的不知變通，已在緬甸耕耘15年，還被台商封為「地下農業部長」的農友種苗緬甸分公司總經理郭坤石仍忍不住搖頭。

幾經斡旋，好不容易找到數塊軍政府管不到的畸零地，就先讓有興趣的農民試種，再一點一滴打下基礎。

農友也花了很長一段時間，透過各種關係，以實際成績爭取軍政府的信任，最後才說服農業部門同意農民在乾季稻米休耕時轉種瓜果。

### 努力播種，改善當地農耕技術

好不容易找到土地耕種後，農友立即面臨第二個難題——如何改變觀念與技術都極度落後的緬甸農民？

郭坤石指出，緬甸農民過去種水果的方式，就是吃完果實後，直接將種子埋進土裡、澆水了事，不但會花錢選購優良品種，連挑牛糞、雞屎施肥的經驗都沒有，因此種出來的瓜果總是個頭偏小，肉白、子多又不甜。

所謂「要怎麼收穫，先那麼栽」，為了精進緬甸農民的農耕技術，1997年，農友與緬甸農業部合作，在仰光近郊成立全國第一所免費的農業訓練所，以每年2期、每期4個月的方式，廣招農民入學；並配合理論與實作課程，傳授學員播種、施肥、催芽、病蟲害防治，以及如何留果、何時採收



工人扛起由農友種苗種子種出的華峰西瓜，緬甸西瓜在中國大陸十分火紅，農友種苗公司的貢獻極大。（下）從種子到育苗、生長、採收，農友提升了緬甸的農業競爭力。圖為番茄種苗。

A worker hoists two Huafeng watermelons grown with Known-You seeds. Myanmar's watermelons are hot sellers in mainland China thanks in no small part to the efforts of Taiwan's Known-You Seed Company. By teaching proper methods of gathering seeds, planting and picking, Known-You has helped raise the competitiveness of Myanmar's farmers. The photo below shows tomato seedlings.

**T**hose who have had a chance to travel in Myanmar will certainly recall the sight of women out in the bright sun selling watermelon slices or carrying the fruits on their heads. A careful taste of those large, juicy and sweet Myanmar watermelons would reveal flavors that hardly differ at all from the world-famous watermelons of Taiwan!

In fact, more than 90% of the watermelons in Myanmar are Taiwanese varieties. The behind-the-scenes player that has brought these Formosan varieties to poor Myanmar farmers (who have in turn used them to generate US\$30 million in foreign exchange) is none other than Taiwan's Known-You Seed Company.



In Myanmar more than 70% of people are farmers. Apart from views onto endless expanses of rice paddies, countryside vistas in Myanmar offer the sight of scattered huts raised off the ground on stilts. With pillars of wood, panels of rattan, and sogon-thatch roofs, these huts are the most common form of housing in Myanmar. Most lack water and electricity. They are vivid demonstrations of the state of poverty experienced by farmers in Myanmar.

At a time when foreign businesses are eyeing Myanmar for its cheap labor, anticipating that reforms will allow the market to show its true potential, very few have been concerned about the country's social needs. An exception is Taiwan's Known-You Seed Company, which has long been working hard to improve the lives of Myanmar farmers.

等整套瓜果栽培技術，至今已有八百多人受惠。

課程結束後，農友選會贈送每名學員價值新台幣5,000元的各式瓜果種子，讓他們帶回家鄉種植，同時也叮嚀這些學員，可以將學到的栽培技術傳授給更多親友。

郭坤石說，曾有受過訓的學員，辛苦了幾年總算賺到錢後，特別回來感謝他，還同時炫耀表示：「今天開來的車是我自己買的喔！」因為緬甸未開放汽車進口前，車價極高，每輛中古車的售價可達新台幣一百萬元，實非一般人負擔得起。

「沒有什麼比看到他們的經濟情況改善更讓人高興了！」他笑說。

### 西瓜選拔大會，打響知名度

考慮到氣候、技術等因素，農友在緬甸推動最賣力也最成功的水果當屬西瓜，其中又以碩大皮薄、肉色紅勻、多汁爽口的「華峰164」，以及甜度高達13度、肉質細嫩、脆而多汁的「華光855」等品種最受好評。

郭坤石指出，緬甸民衆的經濟能力欠佳，願意花高價買優質水果的金字塔頂端客戶有限，因此行銷西瓜不能只著眼於內銷市場，鄰國廣大的中國大陸，更有開發前景。

尤其緬甸西瓜盛產的11月至隔年3月（乾季），適逢大陸水果短缺的冬天，又大又甜的緬甸西瓜，剛好可以因應大陸民衆的需求，可望獲取高額利潤。

行銷緬甸西瓜的策略盤算好後，2000年時，農友種苗首度在鄰近大陸邊界的緬甸木姐，舉辦「西瓜選拔大會」，由各地緬甸瓜農運來整整5卡車的西瓜，再請來一百多位大陸中盤商加入評選。

但因當時緬甸北方邊界尚有少數民族的內戰，外國人無法進入，爲了親自主持這場西瓜盛會，郭坤石整整繞了一大圈——從仰光飛往雲南昆明，再驅車前往鄰近邊界的瑞麗市，最後才順利進入木姐（在中緬邊境的城市，雙方人民常可自由往來）。

不過，由於早年銷往大陸的緬甸水果品質都很差，當親眼看到這些色澤、外觀俱佳的「西瓜佳麗」，大陸中盤商仍然個個觀望，無人敢身先士卒地喊價。

腦筋動得快的郭坤石，立刻安排「槍手」出場，



農友緬甸分公司總經理郭坤石，是行銷緬甸西瓜的大功臣。  
Known-You's Myanmar general manager Kuo Kun-shih is a master of marketing Myanmar's watermelons.

### Cash crops at a time of hunger

Established in 1968, Known-You was founded by Chen Wen-yu, who bred Taiwan's first seedless watermelon.

By now Known-You's seed bank has grown to encompass more than 60,000 plant varieties. Its collection includes more than 1000 wild strains of watermelon alone—allowing it to breed watermelon varieties to suit the individual tastes and conditions of any national market.

Known-You has already developed nearly 300 watermelon varieties itself, with production that accounts for about one-fourth of the global market for watermelon seeds. It exports to more than 50 nations.

In 1994 Known-You began sourcing seeds in Myanmar. It found a nation that was well suited to growing fruit, with fertile flood plains, a warm climate and ample rainfall. Consequently, it targeted Myanmar as a location for doing business.

Yet with Myanmar's command system of economic planning, promoting high-value cash crops hasn't been easy. The military government long exercised strict control over the crops planted on the nation's agricultural land and mostly dictated that rice and other cereals be planted "to fill hungry bellies." It has been hard to find agricultural land available for any other purpose.

"Early on I communicated with Myanmar's then minister of agriculture in the hope that we could hold discussions about obtaining more land for fruit plantings," says Known-You's Myanmar general manager Kuo Kun-shih, who has worked in Myanmar for 15 years and is called the "underground minister of agriculture" in Taiwanese business circles there. "All we got was an unfriendly single sentence in response: 'People die for lack of rice, not for lack of fruit.'" Kuo can't help but shake his head at the recollection.

Known-You eventually found a few scraps of land not controlled by the military to provide to farmers interested in growing fruit. It thus gradually built a foundation for the fruit industry in Myanmar.

### Improving local farming techniques

Having overcome massive obstacles to finally obtain some land, Known-You immediately faced a second hurdle: changing the extremely backward conceptions and techniques of Myanmar farmers.

Kuo points out that Myanmar farmers had been simply taking the seeds of eaten fruit, burying them in the soil, and giving them water. Not only were farmers reluctant to spend money on purchasing top-quality seeds, they didn't even use water-buffalo manure or chicken droppings as fertilizer.

In order to advance the techniques and technology employed

by farmers in Myanmar, in 1997 Known-You worked with the Ministry of Agriculture to establish the nation's first agricultural training center in the suburbs of Yangon. The center, which charges no tuition fees, features two four-month sessions and widely recruits farmers to attend. Its curriculum matches theory with practice, teaching its students how to sow seeds, apply fertilizer, promote germination, fight disease and pests, cull young plants, thin young fruit, and choose the right time to harvest. More than 800 students have studied there so far.

At the end of their studies, farmers receive seeds worth NT\$5000 from Known-You. Graduates are asked to pass along what they've learned to their friends and family, thus expanding the impact of the program.

Kuo says that students can start making profits from growing fruit only a few years after graduating. Many have specially come back to thank him and to show off their success. "The vehicle I drove here today I paid for myself!" one graduate pointed out. Because Myanmar hasn't liberalized its auto market, cars are extremely expensive. A typical second-hand car goes for NT\$1 million, far from what regular citizens can afford.

### Watermelon festival

Because of Myanmar's climate, technological level and other factors, watermelon has been Known-You's best-selling fruit seed there.

Kuo points out that the people of Myanmar are poor, and only a few at the top of the economic pyramid can afford to buy expensive top-quality fruit. Consequently, in marketing watermelons Known-You's Myanmar branch has had to look beyond the domestic market to the vast potential market of mainland China next door.

Particularly during the dry season of November to March, when harvests of watermelon peak in Myanmar and mainland China is short of fruit during its winter, Myanmar producers have been able to meet some of China's demand. And the future looks bright with the potential for high profits.

Having settled on their plan to sell watermelon to the Chinese market, in 2000 Known-You held a watermelon festival and competition in the town of Muse, just on the Myanmar side of the border. The company brought in five truckloads of watermelon from Myanmar farmers, and asked more than

由農友公司出資建設的農民醫院，在當地救治了無數病患。圖為院長（左）與醫療團隊。  
Known-You put up the money to establish a hospital for farmers in Myanmar, which has saved many lives. The photo shows the hospital's superintendent (left) and medical staff.



而且喊出的價格比大陸市場的零售價高出一倍。「我跟他們說，一定要把價格抬高，真的虧錢，一律由我埋單。」郭坤石堅信，緬甸西瓜的品質優良，絕對有這個價值；而且唯有把售價抬高，農民才能多賺一點。

抬價策略果然奏效，緬甸西瓜不但在選美會上的價格飆高，經此一役，更在大陸聲名大噪，價格也水漲船高。如今緬甸西瓜每年與中國大陸的邊貿交易即高達3,000萬美元，年成長10~15%，對增加當地農民的收入極有助益。

### 從救農業到救人

除了引進最新的農耕技術，並協助開發市場外，農友種苗更突破萬難，為貧苦農民籌建一所免費醫院。

郭坤石指出，早在農友前進緬甸之初，就發現當地農民的困頓貧窮程度，難以想像。

「連飯都吃不飽，生病怎麼可能有錢看醫生？」他將緬甸農民的處境回報總公司，原本就希望為各地貧農盡一分心力的農友創辦人陳文郁，從此也立下了在緬甸建造農民醫院的心願。

不過，要在沒有邦交，官方對台灣又不友善的緬甸蓋醫院並不容易，不但申請過程處處碰壁，軍政府甚至一度懷疑——台灣打算對緬甸農民實驗新藥，才會如此大方地蓋醫院。

一度灰心的陳文郁，本欲將建醫院的計畫，挪至「窮人也很多」的鄰國印度，但這個消息後來傳至曾在緬甸叱吒一時的尼溫將軍孫子耳中，他極力和總理與政府部門溝通斡旋，眼看就要胎死腹中的農民醫院計畫，才重新起死回生。

2001年3月，耗資新台幣1億元、占地4公頃的農民醫院，在鄰近仰光的伊洛瓦底省成立，院內設置了內科、外科、小兒科、牙科和婦產科，以及30張病床，包括救護車、X光放射線室、生化實驗室和開刀房也一應俱全。若依照台灣標準來檢視這樣的醫療設備，仍屬簡陋，但已能在當地發揮救人救命的極大效能。

成立11年來，農友醫院光是救治不幸被鎖鍊蛇咬到的農民，即達八百多位；其他像是難產、肺炎、蜂窩性組織炎、急性盲腸炎等原本只能等死，最後受惠於免費醫治而撿回一命的病患，更是不計其數。

深耕緬甸多年的農友種苗公司，或許並非世人矚目的產業焦點，卻是最受緬甸農業部門敬重且深得民心的外商，在兩國尚無正式邦誼的此刻，農友種苗已為台灣寫下最動人的「西瓜外交」故事。 □



夕陽西下，學員扛著鋤頭準備回家，他們是緬甸農業的新希望。As the sun sets, hoe-carrying students in an agricultural training class prepare to go home. They are the best hope for the future of agriculture in Myanmar.

100 mainland fruit distributors to participate as judges.

But because of the ongoing civil war in northern Myanmar, foreigners could not pass through. To manage the festival, Kuo had to take a circuitous route, flying to Kunming in southwestern mainland China and then driving to Muse via the Chinese border town of Ruili.

Nevertheless, because the watermelons that had been imported from Myanmar to mainland China had previously been of such poor quality, when the Chinese fruit dealers saw for themselves the blemish-free watermelons with perfect color, they were dumbfounded and no one dared to shout out a bid.

The quick-thinking Kuo immediately arranged for an undercover bidder to enter the room and shout out a price that was twice the going rate for retail watermelon in mainland China. The strategy worked: The price rose high during the festival, and it didn't take long for watermelons from Myanmar to gain a high reputation in the mainland generally, with

commensurately high prices. Myanmar is annually selling about US\$30 million worth of watermelons to China, and the amount is rising by about 10-15% per year.

### Saving lives

In addition to introducing advanced agricultural techniques and technology and helping to develop the market for fruit and fruit seeds in Myanmar, Known-You has also overcome numerous difficulties to build a free hospital for local farmers.

Kuo points out that when Known-You first entered the Myanmar market, he found unimaginable deprivation among local rural dwellers. Upon reading Kuo's reports, Known-You founder Chen Wen-yu, who has always been filled with the ambition to help the rural poor wherever in the world they may be found, came up with an idea of building a hospital in Myanmar to serve their needs.

Yet doing so was challenging in Myanmar, where the ROC lacks formal diplomatic ties and government bureaucrats aren't

particularly friendly to Taiwan. The company hit numerous obstacles in the permit process, and the military even suggested at one point that a Taiwanese company would only display such generosity if it were secretly planning on carrying out trials of untested drugs, turning the people of Myanmar into guinea pigs.

At one point Chen almost lost hope about being able to build a hospital there, and considered shifting the focus of his charity to next-door India, "where there are a lot of poor people too." But word of his change of heart got to the grandson of the famous general Ne Win, who volunteered to mediate between Known-You and the Myanmar government. The plan to build a hospital for poor Myanmar farmers came back to life.

In March of 2001, the farmers' hospital, costing NT\$100 million, was completed in Aye-yarwady, to the west of Yangon. It features departments of internal medicine, surgery, pediatrics, dentistry and obstetrics, and has 30 beds, an X-ray machine, a biochemistry lab and an operating room.

Open for 11 years now, the hospital has treated more than 800 patients for snakebites alone. It has also treated many for conditions and diseases that might well have previously killed them, including difficult births, pneumonia and cellulitis. Countless lives have been saved by the free treatment that the hospital provides.

Operating as a foreign company in Myanmar for many years, Known-You Seed may not be plying its trade in the sexiest of fields, but it has captured a place in local people's hearts and earned the respect of Myanmar's Ministry of Agriculture. At a time when the ROC and Myanmar lack formal diplomatic relations, Known-You has already written for Taiwan a moving real-life tale of "watermelon diplomacy." □

(Lin Hsin-ching/

photos by Chuang Kung-ju/tr. by Jonathan Barnard)