



Bright smiles for another 100 years



The hundred years of Shofu

Established on 15 May 1922 in Kyoto, Japan, Shofu is a global manufacturer deeply involved in the field of dentistry offering a wide range of dental materials, equipment and instruments.

By Czarmaine Masigla

Over the years, the treatment philosophy in dentistry has shifted from invasive to a more conservative approach – with Shofu spearheading development of products and technologies, emphasising prevention and preservation of natural tooth structure.

Commemorating their centennial anniversary, Mr Noriyuki Negoro, CEO and chairman of Shofu, takes a trip down memory lane with Dental Asia to ponder on the company's founding years, and elaborates on how they will continue to revolutionise the dental industry in years to come.

FOUNDING YEARS

Mr Kajo Shofu III, the founder of Shofu, was involved in numerous businesses, including the export of ceramics, industrialisation of ceramic manufacturing, and the insulator business based on Kiyomizu-yaki porcelain technology, as Mr Negoro shared.

In 1915, during a visit to North America to expand sales channels for the export of ceramics, the founder was advised by Dr Mitsuru Okada, MD (later professor of oral surgery at Keio University School of Medicine) on the need for domestic production of high-grade porcelain teeth.



The journey was not a walk in the park – as it required identifying tooth shapes and sizes suitable for the Japanese people, sourcing biocompatible materials and appropriate manufacturing methods.

Seven years later, after overcoming several challenges, Mr Shofu III realised his dream with the help and cooperation of many people to successfully manufacture the first high-grade porcelain teeth in Japan – laying the cornerstone for Shofu.

In 1965, Shofu succeeded in developing the world's first dental spherical amalgam, "Shofu Spherical Amalgam", recognised by clinicians as a revolutionary product with excellent handling and mechanical properties, and was considered a breakthrough in the dental industry.

Additionally, the company's rotary instruments was well regarded, and the brand reputation of "Shofu Abrasives" was established not only in North America but also in the global market.

Such innovation helped propel the company's overseas expansion, leading to the establishment of sales offices in the US in 1971, Germany in 1978 and Singapore in 1980.

Mr Negoro also shared that during the 1980s when Shofu was under a crisis due to Japan's healthcare reform, then President Kajo Shofu V, changed the company's focus from quantity to quality and implemented management reforms to ensure the company's survival, under the slogan of "Response to Change".

"The foresight of the president and commitment of the employees resulted in the development of a series of high-quality value-added products that helped transform the company into a highly profitable business. As a result, in 1989, Shofu became the first company from

the Japanese dental industry to be listed in the Osaka Stock Exchange and subsequently in the Tokyo Stock Exchange in 2007," he added.

Since then, the company has diversified its product range to include not only artificial teeth, but a wide variety of dental products, laboratory materials, preventive products, and materials for digital dentistry. Now an international enterprise, Shofu has subsidiaries and sales offices in the US, Germany, UK, Singapore, China and in recent years Italy, India, Brazil, the Middle East and Taiwan.

Mr Negoro continued: "These developments aim to contribute towards improving the standards of dental care. The R&D-oriented and innovation-driven management approach adopted since the company's founding is proof that our

founder's passion for 'high aspirations and drive for achieving them' lives on in our DNA."

COMMITMENT TO BETTER DENTISTRY

According to the Global Burden of Disease study published by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2016, dental caries remains the most common disease in the world, despite regional disparities due to economic status and healthcare systems. The Lancet and Journal of Dental Research also reported that more than 30% of people have untreated dental caries.

Hence, Shofu's vision is to continue to provide proven products for better dentistry worldwide with a commitment to quality and excellence, emphasising that beautiful teeth are the symbol of health and happiness.



Mr Noriyuki Negoro, CEO & Chairman of Shofu (Left) with Mr Tetsuo Takami, President & COO of Shofu (Right)

DENTAL PROFILE

With the dental field continuously evolving digitalisation, artificial intelligence (AI), and dental material science taking the centre stage in product innovation, Shofu maintains profitability and growth by identifying expansion opportunities.

“As a company, we had focused our business activities mainly in Japan, a stable market with a generous national medical insurance system and successfully introduced many revolutionary products over the years contributing to the development of dentistry. Our success in the domestic market laid the foundation for international expansion, with more strategic business activities extended beyond Japan to capture the global market,” he explained.

Based on their management philosophy and vision, Shofu is actively engaged in business activities to increase their global presence with continued efforts to provide evidence-based product innovations using cutting-edge technology with end-to-end solutions for the wider dental community.

And although the company promotes globalisation in its business activities internally and externally, Mr Negoro highlighted that it is equally important for them to adapt to local needs across diverse markets.

For instance, the Shofu Dental Asia-Pacific subsidiary has been a crucial part of Shofu’s global footprint looking

after its growth in the Asia-Pacific and Middle-East markets. Recognising that the local treatment trends had shifted from aggressive to minimally invasive, Shofu has become the official partner of the Minimally Invasive Cosmetic Dentistry (MiCD) Global Network and its digital platforms.

Mr Negoro shared: “Our team at Shofu Dental Asia-Pacific felt that the MiCD philosophy matched very well with the benefits of our range of bioactive products, hence we have worked closely with Dr Sushil Koirala and like-minded clinicians to establish the MiCD Concept and treatment protocol.”

BRIGHT SMILES FOR THE NEXT CENTURY

Commemorating their rich history and legacy of product innovations toward enhancing smiles, Shofu launched their 100th-anniversary logo and slogan representing their commitment to contributing to the bright smiles of people globally for the next century.

Mr Negoro noted that as the company values the tireless efforts of its people, the slogan was selected from the employee submissions: “The ‘0’ in the centre of the ‘100’ figure takes the form of a tooth and a face depicting a ‘bright smile’. The line extending from the roots of the tooth towards the Shofu logo indicates the progress of the company over the years from 1922 to 2022, and the journey ahead for the next 100 years.”

Looking ahead, Mr Negoro foresees that public health focus would shift towards prevention and oral health education. He also predicts that AI-driven remote examination with digital diagnostic techniques and preventive treatment will be implemented in each generation, especially in the ageing population.

He elaborated: “Adequate oral hygiene maintenance becomes more challenging in older age group due to chronic diseases such as diabetes, drug-induced xerostomia and other medical conditions as they retain more teeth.

Unlike in the past, implant-supported dentures and partial dentures are becoming more popular increasing the risk of oral disease.”

Therefore, Shofu targets to expand their Giomer/S-PRG technology into various areas and to enrich the Giomer product tree, with a specific elder care product range that includes a homecare treatment regimen for exposed root surfaces and denture-related products.

“S-PRG fillers are incorporated into new bioactive materials based on our proprietary technology (PRG technology), and have been proven to provide bioactive benefits such as inhibiting bacterial growth and adhesion, reduction in plaque formation, acid neutralisation and increased acid resistance by strengthening the natural tooth structure,” he explained.

A gateway to overall health, oral health is essential for people to lead rich and fulfilling lives. As the world enters the era of a 100-year human lifespan, Mr Negoro concluded that the role of dentistry will become increasingly important in extending people’s healthy life expectancy.

“For the next 100 years, we will continue to contribute towards the advances in dentistry while embracing the challenge of creating bright smiles that improve the quality of life of people around the world. In the past 13 years, I have served as the president and CEO of the company and am proud to announce that Mr Tetsuo Takami has now become my successor as the president and COO effective 24 Jun 2022.

“I will oversee the management of the company as CEO and chairman, while Mr Takami will be responsible for business execution. We will continue to focus on developing innovative solutions that meet the changing trends in dentistry and we are looking forward to the future growth of Shofu under the new management.” **DA**

