

Han Yahui - Vice President, Scrianen



We need partners who understand that our mission is more than a business

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Han Yahui from Chinese folic acid specialist Scrianen outlines her company's role in keeping mothers and newborns healthy in China, Scrianen's approach to international partnerships, and the next horizons in its internationalisation strategy.

What is the story behind folic acid and how does your company play into it?

The folic acid we provide today is the result of a collaboration between the US and Chinese governments in the 1980s and 90s. Research teams from both countries engaged in a 13-year cooperation, costing USD 20 million and generating 250,000 cases of evidence-based medical verification

This achievement was subsequently published in well-known authoritative magazines at home and abroad such as The Lancet, the New England Journal of Medicine, the Chinese Medical Association Journal, and the Chinese Journal of Epidemiology. Thus, our company's 0.4-milligram folic acid tablet serves as the gold standard for preventing birth defects. This standard has been adopted by the World Health Organization and more than 50 countries globally.

Could you briefly share some information about your background and experience in the field of cardiac screening?

My manager sent me to oversee the company's front-line R&D. The project initiation of R&D originates from market demands, so having studied enterprise management as my major at university, it was a good fit. While I have overall responsibility for R&D, all the technical work is performed by the PhD and master's degree level researchers. My main responsibility lies in grasping the direction of the project initiation and overseeing the quality and progress of the R&D process.

What is the strategic positioning of Scрианen??

Scрианen began its business by making folic acid, but in recent years, we have gradually extended to some other areas.

Given that folic acid is a relatively easy product to manufacture, how difficult is it to stand out in a competitive market like China?

Our marketing strategy is important here. Many policies regarding folic acid were formulated through the cooperation between our company and the government. This company belonged to Peking University a long time ago, and later we bought it outright.

The Healthy China 2030 policy has a strong focus on prevention - how can a company like Scрианen support this?

Since folic acid was put on the market, we have done a lot of physician and patient education work, including through the promotion of academic conferences. Over the past 20 years, we have organized many human and material resources to form an expert team to give lectures, totaling over 2,500 sessions, and there are a cumulative of 10 million people who have obtained knowledge of folic acid from our lectures. Our expert team will go deep into the counties, villages, and towns in China to carry out the educational work for women of childbearing age.

Would a government policy making the taking of folic acid compulsory, as exists in Europe, be beneficial?

The Chinese government has been promoting the addition of folic acid since 2010, and freely distributing it to eligible women of childbearing age. This further promotes and drives Chinese women of childbearing age to take folic acid.

Are hospitals your primary customers?

When folic acid was first introduced, it mainly relied on the family planning commission system of various provinces and cities in China to complete the purchase. Now we not only serve hospitals, but over the years we have also established a specialized maternity center for pregnant women. The birth rate is of concern to the government, and the government's policies and efforts are very important to us.

Now that the one-child policy has been relaxed, are you seeing an impact on your revenues?

Yes, our growth has sped up since 2015.

Would you say that traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is your biggest competition?

TCM can indeed regulate the body, allowing women of childbearing age to have a better physical constitution and be more likely to conceive. However, our folic acid mainly solves the problem of birth after conception and prevents the birth defects of babies. The two are completely different.

What does innovation look like around a very established product like folic acid?

For folic acid products, we place greater emphasis on quality control, as folic acid is taken by a vulnerable segment of the population – pregnant women. We conduct expanded research on the new indications of folic acid, and folic acid has some effects on the gastrointestinal tract, as well as diabetic complications and senile dementia. Therefore, these indications are all the directions we need to expand and innovate in the future.

What percentage of revenues does Scрианen reinvest into R&D?

Around ten percent of our operating revenue.

How do you find scientists that are engaged and excited to work on folic acid applications?

We recruit high-end talents, such as senior researchers and director-level personnel, through headhunters. Through university recruitment, we recruit auxiliary personnel for research and development, such as laboratory technicians and assistant laboratory technicians.

Given that 80 percent of your revenues come from the mainland Chinese market, could you comment on how this market is growing?

With the elevation of their economic level, the attention of the general public to their own health is constantly increasing. They are more proactive in protecting and maintaining their own health, leading to greater consumption of products like ours. This growth looks set to continue in the future, so we have great confidence in this market.

Additionally, China's ageing population is having an impact as older people pay extra attention to their own health and have a strong consumption power.

Why did you decide to open an office in Hong Kong and what are your plans for international expansion?

We have already started to expand by opening this affiliate in Hong Kong. We hope that through this office, we can expand to Southeast Asia or even the whole world. Additionally, our company's folic acid tablets have now obtained listing registration in Hong Kong which is an important step towards further international expansion.

Southeast Asia has a high birth rate but low prices, does that pose a problem from a business perspective?

We will start our expansion in this region in the form of some public welfare donations. This is also how we started out in the Chinese market, allowing women of childbearing age to get to know folic

acid.

Why did you choose to enter the Canadian market?

Because at that time, the registration regulations in Canada happened to be suitable for us.

How does your market entry strategy for Canada differ from that in other geographies?

When we enter any market, we must develop a strategy that is in line with the local policies, not simply transposing the China market strategy across. Before we enter this market, we need to conduct detailed research, market research and evaluation as well as find some local partners and collaborators.

Do you have any other expansion plans for Africa or Latin America?

We will consider them in the future.

As a female leader, what are some of the key lessons you have taken from over 20 years managing people and leading an organization?

I pay a lot of attention to delegation and allowing the people working with me to reach my full potential. As a woman, I may have a certain acuity and cognition of people, allowing me to put people in positions that match their abilities.

I also attach great importance to performance and assessment. I aim to turn my desired goals into a kind of performance management, thereby leading the entire team to achieve our goals. We aim to clarify the goals of the team and make good use of each person's ability. A person's professional technical ability may be limited, but I am able to make good use of their ability and achieve the maximum value for each person. There is an ancient saying in China that a person who knows people well can make good use of them. Perhaps this is an advantage of a female leader.

Do you have a final message on behalf of your organization?

Our company enjoys a strong reputation in China yet is little known abroad. Our aim is to change this and cooperate more internationally with other actors dedicated to reducing birth defects and increasing quality of life. We need partners who understand that our mission is more than a business. All employees who join our company visit and engage in public welfare in welfare homes and orphanages every year to allow them to understand the significance of their work. Culture is crucial.

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