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Daniel Zimmermann: Mr. Kaiser, where did the idea of establishing a dental laboratory in Singapore originate?

Matthias Kaiser: The idea came from my brother Christoph, who was hired by a French dental laboratory in the mid-1980s but was dissatisfied with quality standards. With his wife Farida, he founded the Kaiser Dental Laboratory in Singapore in 1987. We later followed with proDentum in Berlin for sales in Germany.

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Since the 1990s, a number of Asian countries, such as Singapore and Malaysia, have experienced considerable economic growth rates. What impact have these developments had on the dental market?

Dentistry is and will remain primarily a handicraft. Large entities like in other manufacturing areas, such as the textile industry, are not imitable. Even though there are quite a number of large laboratories in China, individual training and technical routine remain a problem. In the last couple of years, all other international laboratories have left Singapore and are now producing in China or Vietnam. However, conditions and quality standards in these countries vary to a high degree.

In a recent interview with DT Asia Pacific, the president of STD Lab Management in Beijing estimated that there are 8,000 dental laboratories in China. What is your opinion of this potential?

It is a question of quality and demand. In China, everything is mass-produced, but everyone who purchases dental prostheses in that country will soon realise the importance of quality and how difficult it is to retain quality in mass production. I think that Chinese laboratories will be producing for the expanding middle class in the country itself.

Have you thought of entering the Chinese market?

We would be on the same technological level again but more advanced in terms of organisation and marketing. The current trend shows that our view on this is on the right track.

A patient receives treatment at Kaiser’s new dental clinic. (DTI/Photo Courtesy of proDentum)

How do the working conditions in Singapore compare to those in Germany or Europe?

A well-trained technician in Singapore can earn as much as a technician in Berlin or any other part of Europe. Although we have experienced more competitive labour costs in the past owing to the lack of qualified applicants, we received applications from German dentists. Unfortunately, the Singapore Dental Association is refusing to give us permission to hire them, even though we have already received applications from highly-qualified applicants. But we will continue to work on this matter.

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Singapore has recently become a strong player in the medical and dental tourism market. Do you intend to participate in this market as well?

We believe that this could be a good investment, although only a few people would be willing to travel from Europe to Singapore. What we cannot predict at the moment is whether patients from more developed countries in the region will come to Singapore to seek dental treatment. The number of enquiries from Indonesia or Malaysia is noticeably growing. Meanwhile, we are looking for investors who would like to participate in the clinic’s expansion and support our marketing campaigns. And we are looking for Singaporean dentists who speak German well!

Are you planning any special activities for the FDI Congress?

Instead of distributing pictures and brochures, we invite all dentists to see our laboratory facilities ‘in action’ and to speak with our dental technicians and management about possible collaboration. Whoever is interested can just contact us; we’ll pick her or him up at the hotel and bring her or him back to the hotel again.

Our staff speak Mandarin, Malay, English and German.

Thank you very much for the interview.