

China offers great growth for turfgrass industry

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The Peoples Square in Dalian is the focal point of the city's main visitor area.

Recently, I attended the 2001 International Turf and Golfing Conference and Expo in Dalian, China from August 29 through September 1. This was the second visit I have made to China in the last year.

My hope is to provide you with some of my observations of China and the turfgrass industry. Given the few visits I have made, my observations could be construed as rather myopic. I would say however that I think the turfgrass industry – whether in parks, sports turf, or golf – from a global perspective has the greatest potential for growth in China.

Dalian landscape project

Dalian is located in the northeastern part of China (northeast of Beijing) along the Yellow Sea. The city itself is not that old, around 100 years old, with a population of between 3.5 to 5.0 million people. The architecture of the city strikes me as being quite western and is considerably more “laid back” than Beijing, Shanghai or Shenzhen.

From a global perspective, the turfgrass industry — whether in parks, sports turf or golf — has the greatest potential for growth in China.

In China, Dalian is known as the “Black Pearl” due to its beauty. Approximately 10 years ago, the city focused its attention on enhancing its beauty and the surrounding areas through a massive landscaping project.

The focus of the effort was to create green spaces through the creation or renovation of parks, large city squares and to a lesser extent golf course development.

Turfgrasses used are not much different than what we would use in the temperate regions of the United States.

In parks and large recreational areas, Kentucky bluegrass is the turf of choice.

One of the golf courses under construction in Dalian. This course is being built along the Yellow Sea. Typically one finds perennial ryegrass tees and fairways and creeping bentgrass on greens.



The varieties of choice on golf courses (at least the ones I saw) are predominantly Kentucky bluegrass in the roughs, perennial ryegrass tees and fairways and creeping bentgrass on greens.

In Dalian, and also in Beijing, summer temperatures are usually quite warm. I observed many of the diseases we would associate with warm weather like summer patch (*Magnaporthe poae*) on Kentucky bluegrass, brown patch (*Rhizoctonia solani*) on perennial ryegrass and dollar spot (*Sclerotinia homoeocarpa*) on creeping bentgrass. As you move farther south through Wuhan (transition zone) tall fescue is used more and into the southern coastal regions bermudagrass and zoysiagrass.

On some of the golf courses that I visited, the water issues — both quantity and quality — are major concerns (not much different than here).

Soccer (as in much of the world) is the most popular sport played on athletic turfs. Little, if any, turfgrass is used on sports fields below the professional or elite team situation. The traffic and wear that most of the school fields are subjected to is so intense that sustaining turf is nearly impossible.

Knowledge levels

The knowledge base for maintaining turfgrass is growing but is still not at the level found in the United States. Thus, turfgrass conferences that are staged around China

Golf course superintendents in China were enthusiastic, willing to ask questions and share experiences even with a language barrier.

are extremely important in providing information for maintaining turf under local conditions. The turf grass conference that I attended in Dalian was started to help provide information to golf course superintendents.

The conference in many ways reflects the potential of the turfgrass industry in China, initially a moderately attended conference but the potential for growth is great. The conference itself ran for three days with both educational sessions and a trade show.

One of the great things that I like about the turfgrass industry in the United States is the quest for new information and a

willingness to share ideas and new information. This was demonstrated with the range of speakers from academia (both the U.S. and China) to industry representatives (again from both the U.S. and China) and Chinese golf course superintendents.

My experience from traveling globally is the universal quest for turf managers to learn as much as they can. The golf course superintendents in China were enthusiastic, willing to ask questions, and share experiences even with a language barrier.

The facilities for the conference facilities and hotel accommodations were excellent. The hotel I stayed in was similar to any Marriott or Hilton. I could watch HBO or CNN (in English) on the room TVs. In Dalian, as in other major cities in China, hotels that cater to an international clientele provide amenities like restaurants and shops similar to those found in any European or U.S. city. If you get away from the major metropolitan areas it gets a littler rougher.

And, yes, I found the food to be excellent!

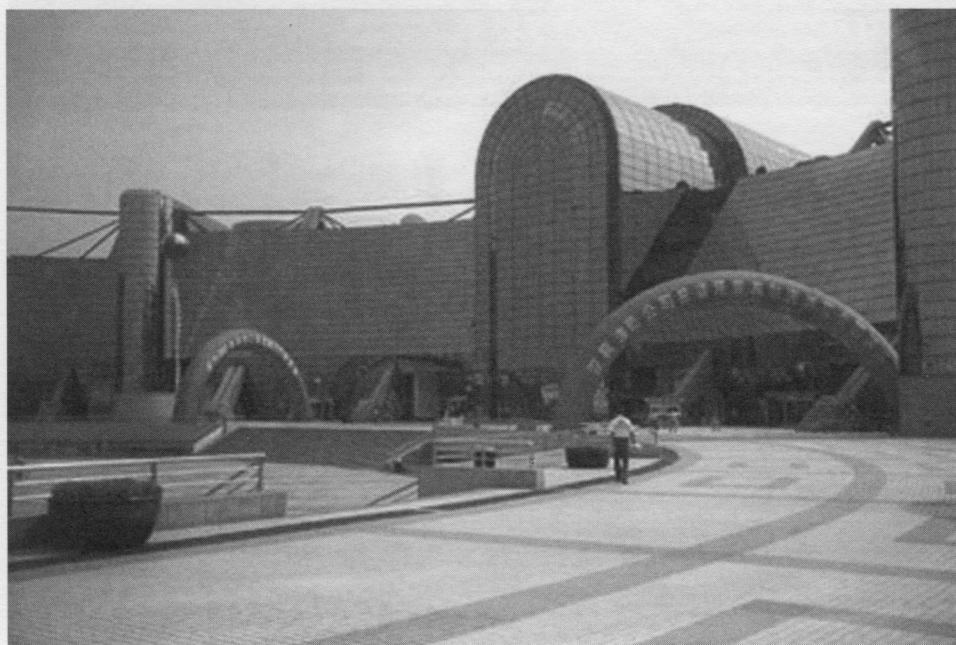
The international speakers and exhibitors were provided (if needed) a translator who helped in translating speeches, helped exhibitors communicate

with customers, and also served as tour guide. These translators were English majors at the local colleges and universities who had a chance to "practice" their English. The vast majority of Chinese students from grade school through high school study English.

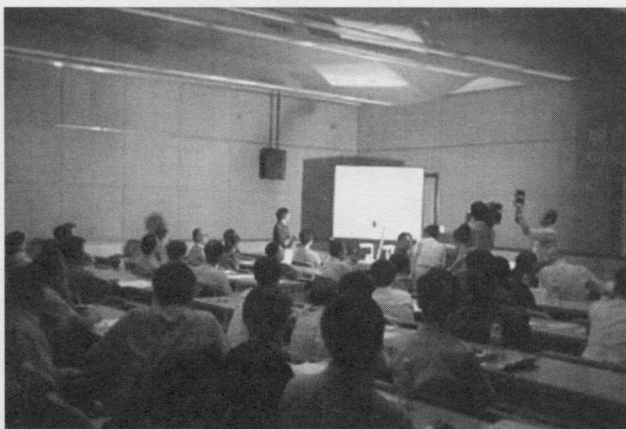
English is common

I was surprised how many people "on the street" have some sort of English proficiency. Interestingly, university students in the United States often complain about their dormitory rooms, in China almost all of the students living in dormitory rooms share them with six to seven other students.

The friends that I have made in China have the same personal concerns that we have. Parents worry about how well their children score on the national tests and which college or university their children will attend. They worry about their jobs and making money as much as we do. There is a strong work ethic among the Chinese in that they are always "busy" and working. The Chinese put a lot of time in developing relationships and these relationships become cornerstones for doing business.



The Dalian Expo Center was the home base for those attending the International Turf and Golfing Conference.



The sessions held at the conference were aimed at providing information to golf course superintendents.

Market potential

China has developed free trade zones that encourage capitalism as a means for expanding their economy. These zones and the general positive attitude of the government toward free trade have provided opportunities for trade with China including the turfgrass industry.

Given the market (population and land size), there is tremendous potential in China. However, as businesses opportunities expand, understanding the culture and how the Chinese work becomes critical for reducing frustration and increasing success.

The biggest change for me personally in visiting China is reconciliation of my prior preconceptions of China (those perceptions developed growing up in the 1960s and 70s) with how it is now.

What strikes me about China is the contrasts in the country are so startling, that it is almost impossible to take in at once. China has undergone a massive change in the last 20 years. The economic growth path that China is currently on will make it a global force in the future. It does however have major problems in dealing with growth (economic discrepancies), and its population.

From a turfgrass perspective, how China develops this industry will be something we should all watch.

Karl Danneberger was an invited speaker to the first annual International Turf and Golfing Conference and Expo in Dalian China August 28 through September 1, 2001. He spoke on managing creeping bentgrass greens and maintaining turfgrass in shade. Dr. Danneberger has traveled and spoken throughout China over the years.