

## THE EXTRAORDINARY DEVELOPMENT OF ARBORICULTURE IN ASIA

*Don Picker, Institute of Arboriculture Studies Hong Kong 2014 ISA Annual Conference Milwaukee*

In Asia for more than a decade modern arboriculture has developed at an unprecedented pace due to modernity combined with an acutely heightened environmental awareness. Mega-urban centers like Singapore and Hong Kong, once known as Pearls of the Orient now prefer to be known as places where a safe green environment is a primary drawing interest. Singapore has promoted the moniker of garden state or garden city with goals set to . With the stress of population in limited spaces there has been a great demand for green surroundings while still experiencing the conveniences of ultra-modern city dwelling. Since the 1950's perhaps directly related to the ending of the WWII conflict and the resulting independent states all around Asia there has been a concerted effort to create cities with an increased percentage of canopy cover while still meeting the needs of explosive population increase for housing and space. While there has been a long history of urban forestry in many parts of China influenced by European practices recently a healthier view of the need to focus on the environment has resulted in a concerted effort to plant trees while keeping pace with the demand created by unprecedented social and infrastructural changes.

Especially with the opening of China to the outside world, since the 1980's there has been a tremendous increase in the public expectation for beautification with trees as the cities have become inhabited by the rural population. This increased emphasis on urbanization and the introduction of private home ownership to China has placed a nearly impossible pressure on tree nurseries and production of plants throughout the country. Nurseries can be expected to sell and replenish their inventories by two or three times each year in order to attempt to keep up with demands. Each time a new airport is built an instant forest along the newly constructed freeways is expected to welcome the traveler as they typically journey for over 20 kilometers into the adjacent cities.

Instant mature landscapes also became a unnatural feature in China with over 500 city-centers building an infrastructure for a population of more than one million in each center. In many instances these *instant mature landscapes* meant that the small percentage of remaining forests even hundreds of miles away were often pillaged to meet the demands. In many cases *tree-brokers* with no knowledge of horticulture or arboriculture and nothing more than a keen awareness of the opportunity to make money entered the market often to the detriment of existing mature trees. The government has since attempted to step in and place limitations on how much of the forests can be used as a source to meet the demands for instant gratification in the city landscapes.

Modern arboriculture development in Asian centers has been enhanced and guided in many instances by those who are well established in the industry. In 2000 while on sabbatical Dr. William Fountain of the University of Kentucky created the opportunity to promote modern arboriculture by introducing representatives of the Singapore National Parks to arborist certification. He then was invited to spend extended periods in Malaysia at the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM) to prepare Malaysian's to also sit for the arborist exam. Also in late 2000 after being approached by representatives of the China Light and Power Company of Hong Kong Derek Vannice, Director of Certification at ISA at the time, introduced Kevin Eckert who was working at the Hawaii Electric Company (HECO) to help bring modern arboriculture training practices to Chinese vegetation management crews. Between 2003-2007 Don Picker who had previously studied Cantonese and Mandarin after selling his tree care company in northern Illinois and moving to China continued to provide modern training for CLP climbers to become certified as Tree Worker/Climber Specialists. In 2006 the first training manual in Chinese was published with the translation of the Tree Climbers' Guide third edition of English. To the present this document remains the only complete guide of its' kind for workers to use Chinese characters to study modern arboriculture practices.

Between 2003 and 2009, primarily in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia, the number of individuals in who had achieved arborist certification in Asia exceeded of the previously established numbers of all of European centers combined. Along with the increase of those holding arborist certification the numbers of individuals receiving specialized training for climbing and general arboriculture practices has been unprecedented.

John Gathright while living in Japan a well-known media personality found the use of trees as a challenge to be a means of introducing those with physical limitations to greater personal fulfillment. He continues to promote modern arboriculture practices in climbing and tree work applications and has had a great influence on the development of the industry to this date.

While president of the ISA 2007-2009 Lauren Lanphear traveled to several Asian centers to discover the present status of the development of arboriculture practices and was instrumental in exposing many to the industry in such places as Laos and the Philippines etc. While visiting in Laos and meeting the forestry officials Lanphear was told that all the Forest Managers had been killed during the Vietnam War era

Established in 2004 by the National Parks Board and the Singapore Workforce Development Agency the Center of Urban Greening and Ecology (CUGE) has promoted modern arboriculture. The center annually produces a full schedule of arboricultural and horticultural courses with the intention of providing a vehicle for individuals to become professionally qualified to manage the *City in a Garden*. It is believed by many Singaporeans that more than 50 years earlier when Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew planted a *Mempat* tree at Farrer Circus, that this was the start of Singapore's highly successful greening campaign, even then that the *Garden City*, was conceived and formed. Since then there have been many special campaigns focused on building and forming the conception of the Garden State as it is also referred to by many. According to the *Singapore Business Review* :

*the Centre for Urban Greenery and Ecology (CUGE) of the National Parks Board (NParks), in collaboration with the landscape industry, the Roadmap (Landscape Productivity Roadmap 2011-2016) aims to build capabilities of the workforce [through] a comprehensive and holistic approach to enhance productivity in across the industry... as part of efforts to grow Singapore into a City in a Garden.*

According to the Singapore National Parks *Media Factsheet*; *Satellite photographs show that almost half of Singapore (47% in 2007) is covered in greenery, compared to about 36% in 1986.* Concerted efforts to make Singapore a garden has helped to drive a clear vision in the development of modern arboriculture for the past decade.

Hong Kong in 2002 through the influence of C. Y. Jim professor of Geography at the Hong Kong University (HKU) led the Hong Kong government's Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) to establish a protective ordinance for especially large, aged and unusual species. These trees are now protected and specially cared for as *Old and Valuable Trees (OVTs)*. In 2008 when a previously inspected tree failed without direct association to a weather event an 18 year old girl was killed resulting in a public response and court action which set in motion the development of an entire government bureau for with special responsibility to create and promote policy on trees. As a direct result of this incident the Tree Management Office (TMO) established in 2010 to hire management specialists for writing arboriculture guides and training materials for tree inspection to promotion of *Trees People & Harmony* as a special theme.

To consider some examples of trees, policies, and the attention given to planting and preservation in some of these ultra-urbanized Asian centers provides insights to the development of modern arboriculture practices in the region... Malaysian Putrajaya, *The Intelligent Garden City* is a planned center of government, is a perfect example of the intense focus on trees and creation of an urban environment within a garden setting...