

LONGEVITY PARK

Grant Donald

Partner & Creative Director, Silk Tree International

Abstract

An exploding aging population in China (WHO figures show that by 2050 China will have more than 330 million Chinese aged 65 or older, with 100 million of them aged over 80), has prompted the Chinese government to try different ways in which to 'manage' this aging population trend and the consequences of it.

This *management* includes not only programs and funding for aged care facilities but funding for the redevelopment of parks and gardens to promote a healthy and active lifestyle. Wanshou Park in Beijing is a shining demonstration of one of these initiatives. The park has been redesigned to reintegrate the elderly into the community, encouraging them to age 'actively' by fostering participation in physical and social activities and using the park and its surrounding facilities to offer additional services such as health and mental wellbeing.

Wanshou park refurbishment, carried out by Silk Tree International, comprises redeveloping the Existing park into four distinct components, encompassing rehabilitation, exercise, music and sport. The design also includes design aspects beyond the traditional – incorporating aspects such as a children's playground to encourage a mix of old and young energies, horizontal mazes and fruit trees to invoke memory through taste, sight and smell. Programmes such as working with local schools and hospitals in the area to participate in activities within the park, as well as looking at ways to improve transport lines to bring bus routes closer to the park were also catered for. The design also investigates how existing buildings surrounding the park could be converted into rehabilitation and health care centres or possible short-term housing, learning and educational facilities. An existing hotel is also being incorporated into the design to allow for aged visitors to the park to stay longer than one day.

If the Wanshou Park redevelopment is successful, it could become a model for other parks and for driving urban development around a focus on rehabilitation and aged care facilities.