



## Portland Classical Chinese Garden The Five Elements: WATER

### Water Feeds Life inside the Chinese Garden

Inside the Portland Classical Chinese Garden water is important to many forms of life. Zither Lake, in the middle of the garden, is home to goldfish and pink lotus flowers. Throughout the garden, over 500 different kinds of plants soak up water and then put out shiny green leaves, some with bright colored flowers, some with fruit, and others with strange-looking blooms. The wintersweet plant loves the rains of winter and brightens the garden, even on cloudy days, with tiny flowers and a big scent that fills up a whole courtyard. Water tumbling down the rock mountain on the north side of the garden creates peaceful sounds to relax all the visitors. From fish to plants to people, water brings harmony and life to all in the Chinese Garden.

### Water Symbols in the Chinese Garden: Dragon Fish and Painted Boat

The garden designers from Suzhou, China chose many symbols of water from their culture to include in the art and buildings in the Chinese Garden in Portland. After walking through the garden gate, people can look up to the top of the roof of the *Hall of Brocade Clouds*. They can see carved dragon fish look like they are leaping off the roof and into the clouds. In Chinese legends, dragon fish fight to swim against the currents of rivers and, therefore, are symbols of being strong and working hard. Also, they are believed to protect buildings against fire because they are water dragons. Across the lake, people can see the *Painted Boat in Misty Rain*. Although it is built on land, it is built to look like many of the boats that float up and down the rivers and canals around Suzhou, in southern China. Water symbols show how important this element is to the lives of everyone.

### Water Teaches Many Lessons to People

Over 2,500 years ago a Chinese teacher by the name of Confucius taught the people of China how to live as caring people among their family, friends, neighbors, and country. Confucius believed that people can learn how to get along with others by carefully watching how nature works. Confucius' ideas are still read and studied by Chinese people of today and by other people all over the world. Confucius said that wise people would find water to be a very good teacher.

Confucius said wise and thoughtful people can learn from studying water because:

1. Water flows everywhere and brings life to everything—like goodness.
2. In a stream or a river, water might have to twist and turn, but always continues on its way—without giving up—to join larger bodies of water.
3. In a lake, water settles down evenly.
4. Water can go around any obstacle, big or small, in its path.
5. Overtime water can wear down the hardest stone.

***Try to put into your own words what Confucius said about the lessons wise people can learn from studying water. Can you add to the list?***

### **Water has Always been Important to the People of China**

Many people know about the Great Wall of China. What do you know about this huge wall of defense? But have you ever heard about another ‘Great’ in China that engineers say was even harder to build?

The Grand Canal in China is the world’s longest human-made river. It flows in a north-south direction and was built because all China’s major rivers naturally flow from the west eastward to the sea. Chinese emperors wanted to bring food that was grown in the south of China to people who lived in the north of the country. Beginning more than 2,000 years ago, different emperors in China’s long history ordered people to dig parts of the canal and extend this long riverbed. As different parts of the canal were linked together into the Grand Canal, this new waterway stretched along a route of 1,800 kilometers.

***Explain in your own words why the Grand Canal is one of China’s great accomplishments.***

***Challenge—Do the Math: How many miles is the Grand Canal? (Hint: 1 kilometer = 6/10 of a mile)***

By the beginning of the Ming dynasty in the year 1368, the Grand Canal connected five large rivers, including the Yellow and Yangtze Rivers, linking many areas of the large country. The Chinese were able to travel their ‘artificial’ river on boats trading goods and ideas. Boats filled with fish and rice (a grain grown in water) and silk clothes and other trade goods were transported from the south to the north of China. For hundreds of years, the Grand Canal helped China to become a great country.

***The Chinese say that water is the circulatory system of the world. The human circulatory system is made up of the heart, blood vessels and blood. Try to explain in your own words how water can be seen as the circulatory system of the world.***