

Liu Fang Yuan Docent Reference

June Li, September, 2007 [last revised: February, 2009]

Talking points:

Chinese name of the garden:

- Liu Fang Yuan (LFY): Liu 流 = flowing; Fang 芳 = fragrance; Yuan 園 = Garden; The Garden of Flowing Fragrance.
- Inspirations for the name: (see Frontiers issue, June 2007)
 - Plants in and around the garden.
 - Literary reference to 3rd century poem where the Goddess of the Luo River scatters floral fragrance when she steps on scented plants. (see Related Story 8)
 - Name recalls Li Liu-fang 李流芳 (1575-1629), famous landscape painter of the Ming dynasty.

Architecture in the garden:

- Garden walls: Chinese gardens are always surrounded by walls that provide privacy, separating the paradise retreat from the dusty world.
- The character for garden, *yuan* 園 = 囗 (radical: to surround) + 袁 (phoneme: yuan) and means "the graceful look of a flowing robe."
- Lattice windows made in Suzhou on the wall: these windows punch through the solidity of the wall and allow glimpses into another world created by the garden. They are of different lacy designs that visually frame scenes in the garden.
- All the roof tiles were made in Suzhou. Drip tiles that edge the roofs are meant to direct water when it rains.
- LFY is built in the Suzhou garden style.
- Suzhou's location: about 80km /50 miles from Shanghai in the fertile lower Yangzi River delta region. Suzhou city has a history that goes back about 1,000 years; historically an affluent region for agriculture, silk/textile production, trade, etc.
- Suzhou gardens: Many famous historic gardens from the 16th/17th centuries and later were mostly built by the wealth of merchant families. Sometimes referred to as scholar gardens because the garden owners either had scholarly interests in art, literature, and history, etc., or had the rank of scholar-officials.
- Characteristics of Suzhou garden architecture can be seen in LFY:
 - Intimate spatial proportions. Buildings are not overwhelmingly huge, but always scaled for human interaction.
 - Delicate wood carvings: from centuries of skilled craftsmen who made Suzhou famous.
 - Fine stone work and rockeries.
 - Poetic gardens highlighted by calligraphy.

Calligraphy and poetic names in the garden:

- Why are there calligraphy and names in the garden:
 - Gardens were designed like landscape painting, with scenic views for the visitors. Since paintings are always accompanied by inscriptions in good calligraphy, elegant gardens too will always contain the beautiful writing.
 - Names of pavilions or scenic spots inspire poetic thoughts and provides added dimension for contemplation.
- Where:
 - Carved on wood placards and hung at the entrances of structures such as pavilions, covered walkways, and courtyards.
 - Carved on stone and placed at scenic spots.
- Literary names:
 - The Flower Washing Brook, Huan Hua Xi 浣花溪 (Related Stories 1, A, B)
 - Bridge of the Joy of Fish, Yu Le Qiao 魚樂橋 (Related Story 2)
 - Bridge of Strolling in the Moonlight 步月 (Related Story 3)
- Literary names with Poetic Couplets:
 - Love for the Lotus Pavilion, Ai Lian Xie 愛蓮榭 (Related Story 4)
 - Hall of the Jade Camellia, Yu Ming Tang 玉茗堂 (Related Story 5)
 - The Freshwater Pavilion, Huo Shui Xuan 活水軒 (Related Story 6)
 - Pavilion for Washing Away Thoughts, Di Lü Ting, 滌慮亭 (Related Story 7)
- Calligraphers for LFY:
 - 13 calligraphers participated in writing for the garden. Some live in our community, while others live on the East Coast, China, and Taiwan. They are painters, poets, professors, doctors, and teachers; each has a deep knowledge of calligraphy and great passion in the discipline.

Floral Motifs:

- Roof tiles are stamped with the chrysanthemum:
 - represents the ideal garden, a retreat for the principled man. This was the garden of the poet Tao Qian 陶潛 or Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365-427) planted his favorite flower the chrysanthemum.
 - The design was taken from the *Mustard Seed Garden Manual of Painting*, printed in the 17th century.
- Camellia designs in the tea house and shop complex:
 - Why: The tea flower or *chahua* 茶花; the young leaves of the *Camellia sinensis* was harvested for tea.
 - 6 different kinds of camellias are carved on the folding wood doors to the tea shop, called the Fresh Water Pavilion. They were carved in Suzhou

after paintings that were done by Los Angeles painter, Peifang Liang-Wang 王梁北方.

- Pine, bamboo, and **plum** design:
 - Where: carved on the ceiling of the hexagonal double-storied pavilion, called the Three Friends Pavilion 三友閣.
 - Why: this design is called the Three Friends because the ever-green pine, the sturdy and evergreen bamboo, and the early-blooming prunus are able to flourish amid the cold of winter; they represent a unity in courage and in the endurance of adversity. The Three Friends Pavilion is surrounded by pines, bamboos, and plums.

Related Stories:

1. The Flower Washing Brook, Huan Hua Xi 浣花溪:

"Flower-Washing Brook" by Zhong Xing 鍾惺 (1574–1624)

The literary critic and poet, Zhong Xing, records an autumn journey in 1611 to Chengdu in Sichuan province. He watches fellow administrators complete their imperial errands and tour with the local officials. Avoiding the crowds and drinking parties, alone in the early morning he visits the Flower-Washing Cottage of Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770), lodge of the pre-eminent poet of the Tang dynasty (618–906). Inspired by the surrounding landscape as the earlier poet might have been, Zhong observes that the Flower-Washing Brook twists and turns beneath the city wall, "looking like a chain of linked rings", and is a deep green color like a mirror. The stream disappears from view and emerges again around rustic houses with neatly arranged bundles of firewood and bamboo fences. Zhong Xing's path is marked by a horizontal board with the inscription, "Flower-Washing Brook".

Two other stories related to the meandering stream called the Flower Washing Brook in the north

A. Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (321–379), "Preface to the Orchid Pavilion Poems 蘭亭序"

The meandering stream recalls the story of good friends, gathered in May, 353, at the Orchid Pavilion to celebrate the spring purification ceremonies. The great calligrapher, Wang Xizhi, assembled the poems written that day and attached his famous Preface. In a place of mountains and lush forests, he records that guests floated their cups on a winding stream. The wine and simple song sufficed to free the "most hidden feelings". During these brief moments, Wang says, "...we let our eyes roam and our hearts speed from thought to thought, we could experience the greatest delights of ear and eye..." Yet, sadly, such moments of true happiness, and indeed our lives, are inevitably lost to time. Appealing to future readers, Wang nevertheless suggests that through the ages, "...all may share what stirs deep feelings."

B. Tao Qian 陶潛 (365–427), "An Account of Peach Blossom Spring 桃花源記"

Tao Qian tells a story that took place in his own time, of a fisherman who happened upon a forest of blossoming peach trees. Entering a small mountain opening, the fisherman finds

himself in a land of broad fields and cottages, of mulberry trees and lovely pools. It is a perfect community of men and women whose ancestors fled the upheavals of a long ago age. Cut off from the world, they are oblivious even of the great Han rule. Enjoying their hospitality, the fisherman is warned not to tell what he has seen. Carefully retracing his steps and returning to his own land, the fisherman is ever after unable to direct others, or to find again, the peach blossom forest and perfect world beyond.

2. Bridge of the Joy of Fish, Yu Le Qiao 魚樂橋

From Zhuang Zhou's 莊周 (ca.369-286 BCE) *Zhuangzi* 莊子, "Autumn Floods" chapter Strolling across a bridge over the Hao River, Master Zhuang comments to Master Hui that the leisurely swimming minnows below certainly is "the joy of fishes". A logical exchange follows between the two masters. How can Master Zhuang know this joy since he is not a fish? How can Master Hui know that he doesn't, since he is not Master Zhuang? And further, Master Zhuang challenges, his companion already knew when he asked his first question that Master Zhuang did indeed know the joy of fishes. He knows it by strolling over the River Hao...

3. Bridge of Strolling in the Moonlight 步月

Inspired by Su Dongpo's 蘇東坡 (1037-1101) "An Evening Stroll to the Temple That Receives the Heavenly" (1083), from *Forest of Jottings*, written in exile and published posthumously.

On a late November night the Song poet, Su Dongpo, writes that he is aroused by the sight of moonlight coming through the doorway. At the Temple That Receives the Heavenly he seeks his friend and together they delight in the full moonlight of the courtyard. The ground appears transformed into the surface of water, and the shadows of bamboo and junipers into "aquatic grasses". In the shared moment, it seems that no evening is without such a moon, and no place without bamboo and junipers.

4. Love for the Lotus Pavilion, Ai Lian Xie 愛蓮榭

Inspired by Zhou Dunyi's 周敦頤 (1017-1073) "Love for the Lotus 愛蓮說"

In this brief essay, the **philosopher**, Zhou Dunyi, expresses himself through the language of flowers. The chrysanthemum, he claims, is the flower of retirement and culture associated with the 4th century poet, Tao Yuanming, and regrettably, seldom favored by Zhou's own contemporaries. The lush peony is favored by the wealthy and powerful and has long been fashionable. Zhou, however, favors the lotus above all. None equal his love of this pure and perfect blossom that rises above its muddy lakebed. It is to be regarded from a distance, its subtle perfume spreading far.

5. Hall of the Jade Camellia, Yu Ming Tang 玉茗堂

The tea pavilion is named after the residence of famous playwright Tang Xianzu 湯顯祖 (1550-1616), author of the popularly acclaimed *Peony Pavilion*. It is thought that Tang liked the reference to purity and naturalness that are represented by the *yuming* flower, a white camellia. Literature describes it to be exquisite and without rivals, likened to the virtues of a high-minded individual with great moral principles. The camellia is called “tea flower” in Chinese, with the young leaves of the *camellia sinensis* picked for tea. Thus the theme of tea is embedded in the name of this gathering place for tea-drinking in Liu Fang Yuan.

6. The Freshwater Pavilion, Huo Shui Xuan 活水軒

The name of the tea house is inspired by the term *huo shui* which may also be rendered more literally as “living water” or “water with a life.” It is from a poem on tea by the great scholar Su Dongpo. In the poem, Su describes how he scoops up the crystal-clear “living water” from the deep river in person, in order to make some tea right there on the spot, using a stove where a “living fire 活火” or *huo huo* is blazing. The couplet in front of the entrance to the tea shop is taken from this poem.

7. Pavilion for Washing Away Thoughts, Di Lü Ting, 滌慮亭

The inspiration is from an **essay** by Liu Zongyuan 柳宗元 (773-819), written for an official to thank the Emperor for his gift of new tea. The sentiments expressed are those of gratitude for the Emperor’s attention and heartfelt appreciation for the fragrance and fresh taste of new tea. It is helpful in “washing away thoughts.” For an official, this was release indeed from all the cares of office.

8. Cao Zhi’s 曹植(192–232), “Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess 洛神賦”

Cao Zhi recounts in a lengthy poem his romantic encounter with the goddess of the Luo River. On his way home from attending court, he sees her, “sinuous as a swimming dragon”, glowing “like a lotus”, and moving “lightly like a startled swan”. The poet describes how the goddess was deeply touched by his delight in her perfect beauty. Walking amid the swirling fragrance (*liu fang*) of flowers, she expressed with glances her longing for him and forever committed her heart. With flowing tears, the goddess finally spoke, then vanished. Sadly, men and gods must remain apart.

Couplets for Liu Fang Yuan

I. Entrance to Love for the Lotus pavilion (map #9)

污泥豈能染 香淡遠益清

二〇〇七年夏日於大希堂中 羅青

Though rooted in the mud, how could the lotus be sullied?
Its subtle fragrance spreads far with even greater purity.
(Summer, 2007, in Daxi Studio, Lo Ching)

II. South Entrance to the Hall of the Jade Camellia (map #5)

入口百憂去 一笑大江橫

丁亥夏日 羅青

Enter as a hundred cares vanish
Laugh as the great river expands
(Summer, Dinghai year, Lo Ching)

III. North entrance to the Hall of the Jade Camellia (map #5)

流水可為琴曲聽 好山須作畫圖看

丁亥夏 白謙慎書

The flowing water can be listened to like music from a zither
The fine mountain should be seen as an image in a painting
(Summer, Dinghai year, Bai Qianshen wrote this)

IV. Entrance to the Fresh Water Pavilion (map #4)

小石冷泉留早味 紫泥新品泛春華

丁亥夏六月 葉揚書梅聖俞茶詩聯

The morning flavor lingers in the cold spring water issuing from the rocks
Spring blossoms waft from the new tea steeped in a clay teapot
(Summer, 6th month of the Dinghai year, Ye Yang wrote Mei Shengyu's *Tea Poem* couplet)

V. Entrance to the Pavilion for Washing Away Thoughts (map #23)

流水可清心 芳山宜靜觀

石聽泉

Flowing water can purify the mind
Fragrant mountains are good for quiet contemplation
(Shi Tingquan, also known as Richard Strassberg)