

Water and the Ponds of Heian Jingu

Water is a key feature of the design of the gardens of Heian Jingu. The Seiho-ike pond in the East Garden is the first and largest. Its waters flow into the Soryu-ike pond in the Middle Garden (Naka Shin'en), and then through the West (Nishi Shin'en) and the South (Minami Shin'en) gardens.

The water in the gardens of Heian Jingu serves many purposes, some aesthetic and some practical. The ponds reflect light, illuminating and visually enlarging the gardens; they serve as water reserves in the event of fire; and their surfaces act as mirrors, accentuating the surrounding scenery. The streams produce a calming sound and are designed to flow in a counterclockwise direction from the east side of the shrine buildings. The main paths begin on the west side of the shrine and proceed clockwise through the gardens. The orientation against the flow of the water encourages a leisurely pace in strolling through the gardens.

This pebbled channel at the southeast corner of the complex brings water from the Lake Biwa Canal into the shrine gardens. The construction of the canal was a major civil engineering project, part of efforts to promote industry in Kyoto after Tokyo became the capital after 1868. The canal was constructed in two stages between 1885 and 1912 to bring water to Kyoto from Lake Biwa in nearby Shiga Prefecture. The first stage was completed in 1890. The canal allowed many fine gardens to be built in various parts of Kyoto, some of which were revolutionary in their conception.