

CULTURAL TRANSLATION

_PLANTS SYMBOLISMIII

The character 梅 (mei, plum) has over time been incorporated into the names of people, places, books, music and art forms. The name of a noted Qing Dynasty scholar, Chen Mengmei, means dreaming of plum. A scholar of the Southern Song, Shi Dazu, gave himself the additional name of “plum creek”.

A famous book is called An Anthology of Plum Village, and a piece of folk music is known as Three Variations of Plum Blossom. Finally, there is an art form known as Plum Drum.

Orchid is admired for its charming fragrance and grace, and is often referred to as a beauty in an echoing valley. Because there are so many varieties, at least one will be in bloom at any given time of the year.

One of the more poignant quotes of Confucius was “To be a friend with a true gentleman is like staying in a house filled with the fragrance of orchids. After a time, one notes not the fragrance, because it is intrinsically present.” That is to say, if one befriends a gentleman. One becomes a gentleman.

The great master of calligraphy, Wang Xizhi, built a pavilion named Orchid on Mt Kuaiji. He invited 42 respected scholars to the pavilion to drink wine and engage in a poetic jam session. He then collected these poems for a book, The Collection of the Orchid Pavilion and wrote a preface to it.

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This piece of writing is highly respected for both its prose and the high aesthetic value of its running script calligraphy. In successive dynasties, many more poets wrote about or artistically expressed the orchid's beauty and grace.

A powerful image painted at the turn of the Song and Yuan dynasties showed an orchid surviving without soil. The artist, Zheng Sixiao, was using this metaphor to convey that although the Yuan Dynasties, a khanate of the Mongols, took over, he would remain loyal to the Song Dynasty.

In late autumn, when hoar frost has already formed and the temperatures in the early morning dip below freezing, the chrysanthemum flourishes. It is regarded by Chinese people as strong, graceful , and with no egotistical desire for fame or gain.

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