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## The Capital City in Bloom

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# The Capital City in Bloom

Translated by Wang Wei Photos by Zhang Xin, Gong Yuexian, Li Zhisong, Jiang Litian

Beijing's spring arrives and departs with a remarkably captivating feature that has an undeniable impact. The most striking aspect of this season is the succession of blooms. Beginning with winter jasmines and Yulan magnolias, followed by peach, apricot, pear, cherry, Chinese flowering crabapple and lilac blossoms, each seems to emerge in turn, transforming gardens, hills, riversides, parks and roadsides into sweeping expanses of colour.

The significance of flowers in Chinese culture is reflected in the ancient name of China itself: "Zhonghua." The original meaning of "hua" is "flower," and the term "Zhonghua" can be interpreted as "the centre of many flowers." According to the *Analytical Dictionary of Characters*, the character "hua" is represented as a tree with branches full of plump rounded buds seemingly on the verge of blossoming.

The Chinese people's affection for gardens, flowers and grasses boasts a rich and extensive history. *The Book of Songs*, recognised as China's earliest collection of poetry, contains 132 poems centred on floral themes. For thousands of years, flowers and trees have remained essential elements of traditional Chinese culture, infused with diverse symbolic meanings.





Beijing Garden Expo Park

flourishing in greenery and demonstrating China's commitment to ecological civilisation on the global stage.

## Historical Destinations for Viewing Flowers

Beijing is renowned for its varied scenic spots and historical landmarks. With the arrival of spring, flower viewing has become a beloved tradition for the city's residents. In the past, floral appreciation formed an integral part of cultural life, providing refined scholars with an elegant opportunity for spring outings and meaningful social interactions.

Earl Hui'an Zhang Yuanshan, a distinguished military official during the Wanli Emperor's reign (1573–1620) of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), spent considerable wealth creating a vast garden that extended across dozens of hectares outside Fuchengmen Gate. The garden gained renown for its brilliant peonies and *shaoyao* (Chinese peony), becoming a splendid sight in the capital. On the fourth day of the fourth lunar month in 1607, the esteemed scholar Yuan Hongdao (1568–1610) and his companions paid a visit to Zhang's garden to admire the blooming peonies. Moved by the spectacular scene, Yuan composed a prose piece titled "A

## A City of Flowers

Beijing is a floral metropolis defined by its four distinct seasons. With ongoing progress in ecological civilisation and continuous improvements to the urban environment, the city has become increasingly picturesque. During a voluntary tree planting activity in the capital, Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee, expressed a vision of "building the capital into a large garden for all to enjoy." In March 2024, Beijing formally issued *Opinions on Deepening the Practice of Ecological Civilisation and Promoting the Development of the Capital as A Garden City*, along with *Special Plan of Developing Beijing into A Garden City (2023–2035)*, officially marking the beginning of a new chapter in the city's development in this direction.

The Special Plan, which has attracted widespread public attention, several key elements are highlighted. According to the plan, the Taihang and Yanshan mountains will be strategically utilised as ecological forest barriers, while five major rivers, including the Yongding and Chaobai rivers,

will play a role in connecting the mountains, waterways and residents throughout the city, along with its two prominent axes that showcase the capital's iconic image. Three interconnected park rings will be developed to form a cohesive recreational system, and nine planned wedge-shaped green spaces will be integrated to enhance the city's overall ecological function. Through these measures, Beijing aims to be built into a true garden city—featuring clear skies, clean waters, lush forest clusters, an impressive layout and a harmonious liveability.

The plan signifies not only a reshaping of Beijing's urban ecological structure but also a meaningful embodiment of the core concept of "harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature." The development of Beijing into a garden city includes a high-standard, broad-scale design and carefully detailed implementation steps, offering a distinctive "Beijing Plan" as a model for building a beautiful China.

Over the past decade, Beijing's ecological environment has undergone truly remarkable changes. For example, extensive greening

efforts have covered over 130,000 hectares (ha), resulting in a forest coverage rate of 44.9 percent and 1,100 parks now established across both urban and rural areas. In addition, the rivers and canals flowing through the capital have been restored to clear conditions, and over 800 previously dormant springs have resumed their natural flow. PM 2.5 levels have met national environmental standards for three consecutive years.

Throughout this transformative process, the unique charm of the capital has become even more captivating. After restoring the scenic "Viewing Western Hills from Silver Ingot Bridge" landscape, the panoramic view became clear and unobstructed. On a clear day, gazing westward from the tranquil waters of Houhai Lake reveals the picturesque distant hills. Meanwhile, Chongyong and Ping'an streets have been improved to revive the character of graceful layout and simple courtyards, continuing the vibrant atmosphere that defines the "Beijing-style" metropolis. Across Beijing, more parks have removed their walls and fences, opening themselves to both locals and visitors,

allowing them to enjoy the pleasure of being close to nature.

The Jin Dynasty Zhongdu Ruins Park, steeped in rich history and culture, serves as a tranquil green space for all to enjoy. The park is adorned with a wide variety of lush plants, while vibrant *yueji* (Chinese roses) and tulips are in full bloom, attracting numerous locals and tourists.

As the first "National Forest City" located within the city's plain area, the Beijing Municipal Administrative Centre has become a popular destination for many seeking floral beauty during their spring outings. Over 50 parks are distributed throughout the area, including forest, comprehensive, community and pocket parks, as well as small and micro green spaces, achieving the ambitious goal of allowing residents to "see green within 300 metres (m) and reach a park within 500 m" whenever they step outside. In addition, over 400-kilometres (km) of interconnected greenways run through the northern and southern sections of the administrative centre, while eight distinct clusters of lush forest, each spanning over 600 ha, link the eastern

and western areas—together presenting a vivid picture of the ongoing construction of ecological civilisation.

In December 2024, the 80-km waterfront trail and urban greenway system were fully connected, completing a vibrant and picturesque blue-green interwoven waterfront corridor.

The Chinese rose is one of Beijing's officially designated city flowers. Whether travelling along the ring roads or strolling through parks and neighbourhoods, people are bound to encounter the vibrant presence of Chinese roses in full bloom.

At present, the total area dedicated to planting Chinese roses in Beijing exceeds 2,000 ha, encompassing more than 2,500 varieties. More than three decades of cultivation have helped transform the capital into a truly well-deserved "city of Chinese roses."

Beijing has evolved into not only a city of Chinese roses but also a city of gardens. This ancient capital is undergoing a renewal,







A sea of rapeseed flowers in Wenyu River Park

Beihai Park

Visit to the Peony Garden,” capturing the splendour of the blossoms.

During the Qing Dynasty, Emperor Kangxi (reign: 1661–1722) held a deep appreciation for flowers in his daily life, which greatly influenced the development of imperial gardens. In the third lunar month of 1703, Gao Shiqi (1645–1703), a highly favoured courtier, accompanied the emperor to admire the Garden of Everlasting Spring. Later, in one of his essays entitled “The Secret Records of Pengshan,” Gao described the imperial garden as a place brimming with vibrant blossoms and filled with sweet fragrances. Historically, the garden was renowned for its landscape design, which combined hills and bodies of water, as well as a variety of waterfront architecture and many kinds of flowers and trees—all highly favoured by Emperor Kangxi.

For flower-viewing, emperors and members of the elite possessed their own private gardens. But where did ordinary people go to admire blossoms? Their preferred destinations were often ancient temples. It was widely recognised that the peonies of Chongxiao Temple, the Chinese flowering crabapples of the Temple of Flowers, the Chinese peonies of Tiansing Temple and the lilacs of Fayuan Temple comprised the four major flower-viewing experiences within the capital. In earlier times, with the arrival of spring, any flower appreciation outing would almost include visits to these four historic temples, each famed for showcasing blooms that were especially representative of the capital.

At the end of the Qing Dynasty, the peonies at Chongxiao Temple spread across the grounds like a stunning carpet, creating a delightful spectacle. The Temple of Flowers became the first stop for Beijing residents wishing to admire Chinese flowering crabapples during the Qing Dynasty. Dating back to the Northern Wei Dynasty (AD 386–534), Tiansing Temple had a long tradition of cultivating peonies. Fayuan Temple has long enjoyed a reputation for its lilacs. In 1924, the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), accompanied by Chinese poet Xu Zhimo (1897–1931), visited the temple to admire its lilacs.

## Global Floral Exchanges

The exchange of plant cultivation techniques between China and the West represents a chapter rich in both elegance and the spirit of adventure in the history of human civilisation. Over the course of millennia, China and the West have conducted extensive exchanges of plant species via the Silk Road and maritime trade routes. Historically, Beijing not only served as a centre of cultural communication between China and the West, but also as an imperial hub for botanical exchanges linking China with the wider world. Through palace garden construction, overseas trade and the presentation of diplomatic gifts, a wide array of exotic and rare plants from distant lands were gathered in the ancient capital, giving rise to many colourful and legendary tales. At the same time, a number of plants native to China were introduced to Europe, adding to the splendour of its gardens and serving as a compelling illustration of the mutual enrichment that has taken place between civilisations through these botanical exchanges.

In 1757, the court artist Yu Sheng (1692–1767) was commissioned by Emperor Qianlong (reign: 1735–1796) to depict eight well-known flower species introduced from the West, using traditional Chinese painting techniques. These paintings were later compiled into a collection titled “An Album of Flowers from the West.” The flowers featured in the collection had been brought to China by the French botanist Pierre Noël Le Chéron d’Incarville (1706–1757), who had been assigned to work within Emperor Qianlong’s imperial gardens. They were cultivated in a Western-style garden located outside the Xiyanglou area of the Yuanmingyuan. The Imperial Grand Secretary Yu Minzhong (1714–1780) wrote inscriptions detailing the Chinese names and characteristics of these Western flowers, which accompanied the paintings in the album.

In September of 1792, coinciding with the celebration of Emperor Qianlong’s 83rd birthday, King George III (reign: 1760–1820)

of the United Kingdom appointed George Macartney (1737–1806) as an ambassador to lead a delegation of nearly 100 individuals to China. This marked the first formal diplomatic interaction between China and the United Kingdom. The members of the delegation were carefully selected professionals from a wide range of disciplines. Among them were three botanists, one of whom was the deputy envoy, George Staunton (1737–1801). He later took back some specimens collected in Beijing and its surrounding areas to the United Kingdom, greatly contributing to the progress of British natural history studies.

Coincidentally, in the same year, Kew—the Royal Botanic Gardens in the United Kingdom—received a particularly special plant specimen called “Old Blush,” which was the first ancient Chinese rose to be successfully transplanted and cultivated there. Over the next half-century, plant collectors such as Ernest Wilson (1876–1930), representing various European countries, continued to transport celebrated Chinese flowers to Europe aboard the merchant ships of the British East India Company.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Kew’s management commissioned Wilson to collect ornamental horticultural plants in China that were suitable for cultivation in the United Kingdom. He undertook four separate expeditions to China, each yielding remarkable success. A large number of

plant species, including the meconopsis, Chinese rose, kiwi fruit and winter jasmine, were introduced to the West through his dedicated efforts. Wilson referred to China as the “mother of gardens” in the world, emphatically stating, “No garden in the temperate regions of the Northern Hemisphere does not cultivate several plants of Chinese origin. Without imported plants from China earlier, our gardens and related flower resources would be much poorer today.”

Empress Joséphine (1763–1814), the wife of French Emperor Napoleon I (reigns: 1804–1814, 1815), was deeply fond of roses. In 1799, she acquired the Château de Malmaison, located near Paris, where a legendary rose garden was established. This garden boasted more than 150 distinct types of French roses, including over 20 varieties of ancient Chinese roses such as Monthly Rose, Old Blush and Rosa indica odorata. From then on, the Chinese rose has continued to evolve into ever more beautiful forms, becoming one of the world’s most beloved ornamental flowers. Without the invaluable contribution of the ancient Chinese rose, the later development of modern roses with their extended flowering periods would not have been possible—an assessment widely recognised by the global horticultural community.

In 2016, the WFRS Regional Convention was held in Beijing. During the event, more

than 2,000 different varieties of Chinese roses from around the world were in full bloom. This extraordinary event served as a floral dialogue that transcended the boundaries of time and space, vividly demonstrating the ongoing cultural exchange.

Beijing continues to demonstrate its openness and inclusiveness, establishing itself as a hub of cross-cultural exchange—as reflected in Western flowers blooming at the Xiyanglou in Yuanmingyuan and the elegant Chinese rose varieties thriving in Empress Joséphine’s garden. Today, when people admire a splendid peony with a history spanning a thousand years, their admiration reaches beyond the flower’s delicate petals, embracing a universal longing for beauty.



▼ Peonies at Jingshan Park







# Spring Awakening

Translated by Wang Wei

Photos by Zhang Xin, Jiang Litian, Wu Hui, Tong Tianyi, Huang Ran, He Rong

As the curtain of spring rises, Beijing is draped in a floral sea. Embraced by the season, the city sheds its winter austerity, radiating newfound charm. Ancient buildings, typically solemn, soften beneath spring blossoms, trading their coldness for grace. Across the city's parks, vibrant flowers vie for attention, transforming them into a paradise of colour, their fragrance filling the air. Trains glide past elegant floral clusters, as if entering a dreamlike tale. On the glassy lakes and rivers, pleasure boats drift lazily, meeting a uniquely romantic spring scene mirrored in the ripples.





## Spring Blooms Highlight Ancient Architecture

The arrival of spring in the capital always has a distinct character, as the so-called springtime is often late, waiting for the white apricot blossoms to accentuate the wooden architecture and overhanging eaves of grand palace complexes, and for Yulan magnolia blooms to highlight the carved window lattice of ancient altars and temples. Only then does it generously bestow its warmth and fragrance upon the city with storied cultural and historical heritage.

Yulan magnolia blossoms herald the season's arrival in the Forbidden City. By mid-March, the courtyard of the Palace of Accumulated Purity boasts both delicate purple magnolias and pristine white ones. Those in the Imperial Garden are equally graceful, their nobility heightened against vermilion walls and golden tiles. Soon, apricot blossoms join this spring spectacle. Across the Imperial Garden, the Palace of Earthly Tranquility and the Palace of Longevity and Health, apricot trees compete for attention with vibrant blooms. During Qingming Festival, an ancient pear tree with cascading blossoms in the Palace of Celestial Favour leans against its vermilion gate, as if awakening a *chi*-dragon head statue. Meanwhile, Chinese flowering crabapples before the Gate of Literary Brilliance peak in bloom, their pink and white blossoms clinging to gnarled branches like pearl hairpins adorning a noblewoman—softening the Forbidden City's solemnity. Lilacs, flowering almonds and peach blossoms also show off their beauty in every corner of the former imperial palace. The lilacs in the Palace of Prolonging Happiness and the Palace of Longevity and Health release a crisp, fragrant aroma. Pink flowering almonds around south of a gate in the Imperial Garden and outside the Gate of Martial Valour contrast vividly with ancient walls and stone lions. Nearby, peach blossoms around Dongchangfang erupt in full bloom, lending the former imperial palace a final flourish of spring charm.

The Chinese wisteria flowers at the Confucian Temple seem imbued with cultural significance. Cascading purple blooms around Dacheng Hall appear to perfume the hall's plaque—inscribed with “an exemplary teacher for all ages”—and drift through the ancient patterns of the Qianlong Stone Scriptures. The flowers hang from their vines, creating a waterfall-like spectacle. Walking through air scented with wisteria, visitors might picture ancient students diligently reciting texts in this timeless setting. At this site honouring the founder of Chinese education, gnarled cypress roots quietly but forcefully upheave the paving stones. Below, fallen purple petals carpet the ground like scholarly annotations inked beneath moonlight.

Zhihua Temple stands as a timeless cultural treasure of the city—so much so that even the pear blossoms within seem to understand the essence of the Sanskrit music performed inside its walls. The ancient pear tree branches in front of the main hall are thriving, their white blossoms casting dappled light onto the glazed blue tile roof. The petals bloom gently in layers, gracefully adorning the branches. The blooming blossoms cluster in small groups, as if whispering secrets, while others bloom alone, like self-possessed and noble beauties. From a distance, the blossoms resemble elegant white clouds, as if descending from the sky to bless the ancient temple with their pure glow. These pear blossoms are a cherished gift bestowed upon the temple each spring, year after year, enriching the site with their quiet elegance and offering a warm welcome to all who visit.

Cultivated within the West Yellow Temple, the Yulan magnolias' blooms seem imbued with Buddhist teachings. Passing through its gates, visitors feel transported to a realm of serenity. The flowering magnolias complement the ancient architecture perfectly, creating an exquisitely graceful tableau. As they stroll through the blossom-filled temple, soft Sanskrit chants occasionally drift through the air. This celestial music harmonises

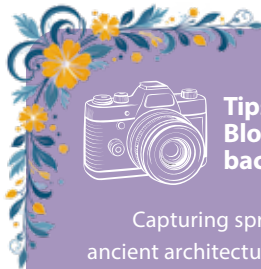


1. Yulan magnolia blossoms at the West Yellow Temple
2. Spring blossoms in the Imperial Garden of the Palace Museum
3. Pear blossoms at Zhihua Temple

with the tranquil beauty of the blossoms, evoking profound reverence. The mingling scents of magnolias and distinctive temple incense create an immersive atmosphere that washes away worldly cares, leaving the spirit renewed.

With spring's arrival, the solemn Yinshan Pagoda Forest comes alive with the grace of blossoming flowers. Along cliffs and through valleys and ravines, peach, apricot and weeping forsythia burst forth together, all radiating vibrant energy while proclaiming life's vitality. In this refined spring setting, flowers and ancient pagodas complement each other perfectly. Delicate pink peach blossoms and pinkish-white apricot blooms encircle these timeworn Buddhist structures, blurring the lines between time and nature. This convergence of flowering splendour and ancient pagodas crafts a spring encounter that embodies a spiritual pilgrimage.

Each ancient building in the capital, down to its eaves, bricks and tiles, seems infused with the fragrance of blossoming flowers, as if reciting an ode to the splendour of spring and rendering the season softer and more refined. The city's historic architecture, weathered by centuries of wind and rain, appears to carry the imprints of time etched into the cracks of its bricks and to tell silent stories woven into the sweet scent of flowers in bloom. When the spring breeze comes knocking again in the year to come, fresh and enchanting legends will surely blossom upon the city's tender petals.



### Tips for Capturing Spring Blossoms against the backdrop of ancient Buildings

Capturing spring blossoms against the city's ancient architecture calls for a range of skills. Timing is crucial—soft morning light, the warm glow of evening and even the gentle diffusion of a cloudy day each imparts a unique mood. Mastering framing, symmetry and foreground composition adds depth and artistry to photographs. Shooting upwards can emphasise height, downwards can capture panoramic views, while a head-on angle reflects a sense of harmony and integration. Adjust the aperture, shutter speed, ISO, blur, clarity and image quality as needed. Post-processing offers the chance to refine colour, crop and optimise the image to highlight your chosen theme, enhancing the fleeting beauty of spring blossoms set against timeless architecture.





## Floral Scents Filling Parks

With the arrival of spring in the capital city, parks of all sizes are transformed into floral paradises, inviting leisurely exploration and discovery.

The China National Botanical Garden offers a vibrant floral landscape. Upon entering, visitors are greeted by a dazzling display of colour. By mid-March, the garden bursts into life, particularly around Chengjing Lake in the North Garden and along the Peach Blossoms Stream to the west of the Cao Xueqin Memorial. From a distance, the scene glows with brilliance, merging with the surrounding hills and lush trees to form a picturesque spring scene—a gift from Mother Nature.

After admiring the peach blossoms, visitors can appreciate the elegance of the blooming Yulan magnolias. In the Magnolia Garden—on the south side of Wofo Temple in the North Garden—and the Magnolia Exhibition Area to the north of the Tree Zone, the beauty of the white magnolia flowers captivates all who pass by. Sunlight bathes the blossoms, creating a soft glow that evokes the image

of graceful fairies vying for attention. Meanwhile, the Mei Garden, west of Wofo Temple, bursts with colourful plum blossoms. The graceful display of fiery red, pure white and soft pink plum blooms strive to display their unique charm, attracting visitors into an enchanting springtime atmosphere.

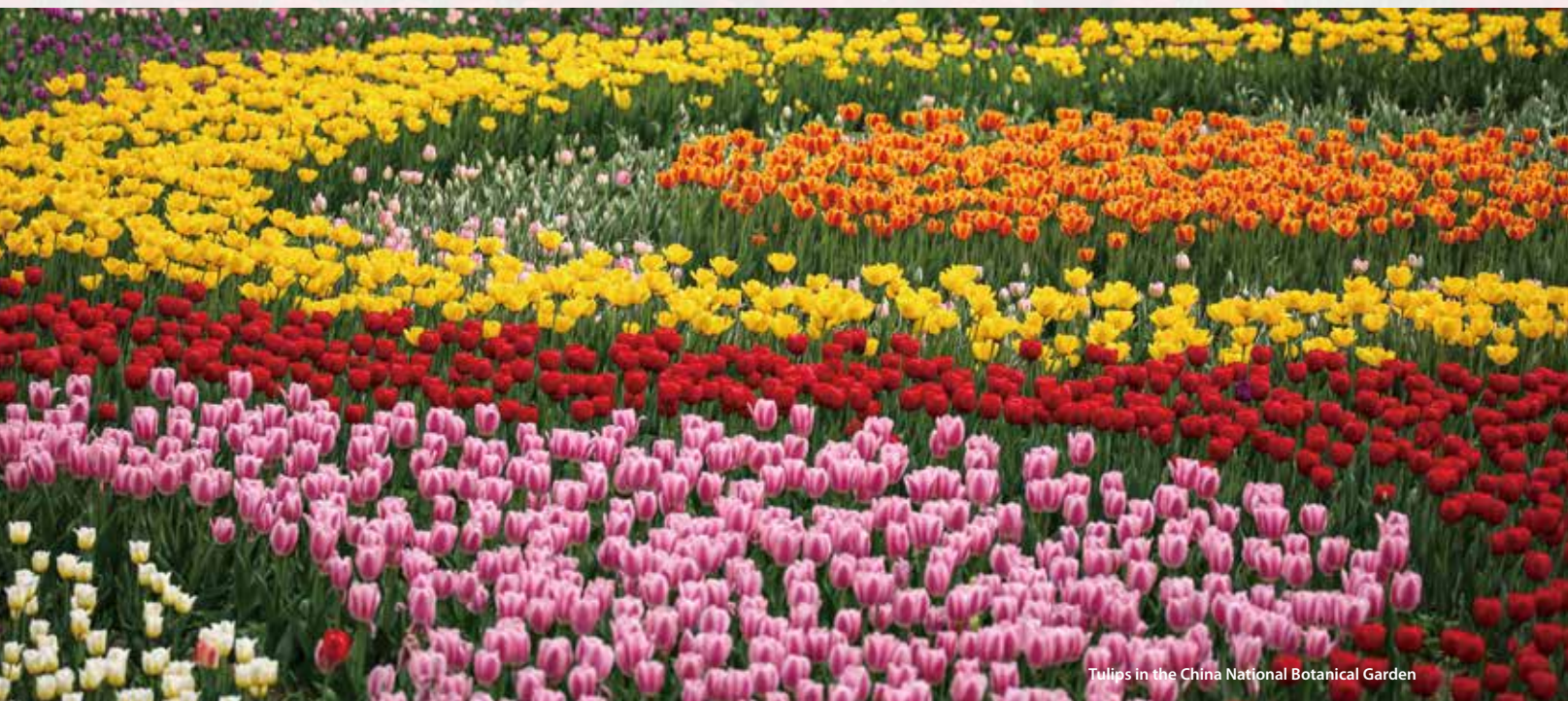
In April, the tulips on the west side of the Scientific Popularisation Museum in the North Garden steal the show. Their red tones dazzle, pink hues enchant and purples shimmer like clusters of mysterious gemstones. Gathered in vibrant clusters, these tulips form a striking contrast with the delicate peach blossoms, towering poplars and distant, verdant hills. Together, they compose an unforgettable ecological panorama.

With its rich abundance of floral displays, the Olympic Forest Park is an ideal destination for a springtime outing. By mid-March, the blossoms in the North Garden's Peach Blossoms Valley begin to bloom in quick succession, as if answering the call of spring. Clusters of light pink petals gather densely and delicately on the branches, creating a captivating and enchanting scene. As visitors stroll

leisurely through the area, they have the perfect opportunity to capture the true essence of spring in every photograph.

In the days that follow, Yulan magnolia blossoms emerge as another vibrant and captivating highlight of spring. Starting as fluffy, tightly closed buds, they quickly unfurl into elegant blooms with pristine white petals and a delicate fragrance. This subtle scent drifts through the surrounding woods, infusing the park with a refined and graceful atmosphere, leaving visitors with the sense that spring has taken on a more sophisticated charm.

In April, the rapeseed flower terraces on the east side of the South Garden wetlands offer a truly magnificent visual spectacle. Bathed in warm sunlight, waves of golden blossoms ripple gently in the soft spring breeze. Their sweet, heady fragrance completely immerses visitors in the joys of the season. Meanwhile, between the east and north gates of the North Garden, Chinese flowering crabapple, flowering almond and cherry blossoms burst into full bloom, transporting visitors to a floral paradise—as if touched by the grace of the Floral Goddess.



Tulips in the China National Botanical Garden



▲ Crabapple Blossom Creek at Yuan Capital Earthen Wall Relics Park

The Yuan Capital Earthen Wall Relics Park is renowned for its spectacular displays of Chinese flowering crabapple blossoms. During the Qingming Festival, the banks of the Xiaoyue River within the park are transformed into a haven of blooming crabapples. A diverse array of cultivars—including midget crabapples, Malus 'Snowdrift' and Malus 'Parfait'—bloom in succession. Stretching over 1,000 metres along the riverbank, the area is fondly known as Crabapple Blossom Creek. Some blossoms dazzle with unforgettable beauty, while others exude a fresh, elegant charm, like graceful girls with quiet allure. Visitors can stroll leisurely along the riverbank, admiring the colourful, rosy blooms and savouring the sweetness and serenity of spring. The enchanting atmosphere invites them to linger, drawn in by the captivating beauty of the surroundings.

Longtan Park provides a truly distinctive spring experience. Beginning in late March and continuing through mid-April, the park comes alive with a vibrant, colourful display of Yulan magnolias, cherry blossoms, Chinese flowering crabapples and flowering almonds, all competing to create a breathtaking seasonal spectacle. The magnolia blossoms that line the lakeside appear especially elegant, their pure white petals perfectly



Spring blooms at Jiangfu Park

complementing and enhancing the charm of the surrounding antique architecture. The cherry blossoms, soft as drifting clouds, flutter gently in the spring breeze, creating a graceful floral rain that seems to fall just for visitors. The flowering crabapple trees form a picturesque pink corridor, inviting guests to stroll through what feels like a dreamlike fairy tale world. Meanwhile, the flowering almonds boast a vivid palette of red, pink and purple, with each individual tree and blossom vying for attention.

During spring, Jiangfu Park is ablaze with a vibrant and diverse array of floral displays. The soft pink and red hues of peach blossoms blend with the pure white tones of pear blossoms, scattering across the park, beautifully adorning the

landscape and enhancing the entire space. Alongside a railway line that runs through the park, an expansive field of Chinese violet cresses forms a sea of purple. This sweeping violet bloom not only adds a touch of grace and elegance to the surroundings, but also creates a tranquil, soothing atmosphere for visitors.

In the spring within Beijing, each park comes alive with the vibrant presence of these alluring flowers. Each species—whether characterised by delicacy, elegance, nobility or romanticism—tells its own unique story of spring through the beauty it naturally possesses. This phenomenon allows visitors to fully appreciate the encompassing splendour of nature and to directly experience the invigorating power of life in full bloom.





A train to spring

## Admiring Blooms by Train

Springtime in Beijing is a season when trains and seas of flowers intertwine in harmony. Carried by the gentle spring breeze, the railway and metro lines of this ancient capital are transformed into flowing, picturesque blossom-viewing routes. As passengers travel past hills, gardens and city streets, they are treated to a splendid and magnificent floral display. Let us board these designated “trains to spring” for a graceful and elegant journey, discovering breathtaking scenes filled with blossoms.

**Option One: Beijing Suburban Railway Line S2 for the Sea of Flowers along the Great Wall**

Suburban Railway Line S2 starts its journey from Huangtudian Station, carrying passengers through rolling hills towards the Badaling section of the Great Wall. From mid-March to early April, peach and apricot blossoms bloom in succession along the Juyongguan, Shuiguan and Badaling sections, creating a picturesque floral landscape that perfectly complements the winding Wall and the passing trains.

Huahaizhandao, located in the Juyongguan section, offers several excellent viewing points. The 3rd observation deck provides a sweeping panoramic view, while the 2nd observation deck captures the iconic image of a train curving in an “S-shape” through a vibrant sea of blooms. After disembarking at Badaling Great Wall Station, visitors can walk to the scenic area, where the combination of mountain blossoms, the majestic Great Wall and moving trains creates a truly magnificent vista. The train also makes a brief stop at Qinglongqiao Station, which is entirely enveloped in flowers, turning the windows into perfect frames that capture the essence of spring.

**Option Two: The Xichang Line of the Beijing–Guangzhou Railway for the Peach Blossom Valley in the Beijing Garden Expo Park**

The 20-hectare Peach Blossom Valley in Beijing Garden Expo Park serves as a “natural studio” along the Yongding River Bridge section of the Beijing–Guangzhou Railway’s Xichang Connection Line. From mid-March to early April, peach blossoms in vivid hues blanket the hillsides, creating a scene where

trains pass through a sea of flowers before disappearing into the Yingshanzui Tunnel—a breathtaking vista that photography enthusiasts will not want to miss. The magnificent and towering Yongding Tower, framed by peach blossoms, radiates a sense of solemnity and serenity. Between its overhanging eaves and traditional Chinese wooden supports, blossoms peek out cheerfully, adding splashes of vibrant colour to the grand structure. From the observation platform on the ninth level, visitors can enjoy panoramic views of Peach Blossom Valley and capture the “train to spring” as it winds through the floral landscape.

**Option Three: Beijing Modern Tram Xijiao Line for the Spring Blossoms in the Former Imperial Gardens**

This line, running from Bagou Station to Fragrant Hills Station, links one of the former imperial gardens (the Summer Palace) with the China National Botanical Garden, Fragrant Hills and Beiwu Park. In spring, the route transforms into a vibrant floral spectacle as peach, Yulan magnolia and cherry blossoms bloom in succession, creating moveable floral displays throughout

the journey. Getting off at the West Gate of Summer Palace Station, visitors can discover the West Causeway of Kunming Lake, where red peach blossoms appear alongside weeping willows, and the courtyard of the Hall of Happiness and Longevity, scented by the fragrance of ancient Yulan magnolias. From China National Botanical Garden Station, people can enjoy wintersweets, peach blossoms and tulips blooming across the garden, with the Peach Blossom Stream near the Cao Xueqin Memorial standing out as a particular highlight. Exiting at Fragrant Hills Station, they may climb the hills, where apricot, cherry and Chinese flowering crabapple blossoms bloom one after another. Each bend reveals fragrant, ever-changing views. Finally, do not miss Chapeng Station for Beiwu Park, where golden rapeseed fields present a captivating landscape, complete with small bridges and wooden boardwalks traversing the water.

**Option Four: Subway Line 13 for Jing-Zhang Railway Heritage Park**

Subway Line 13, which runs between Zhichun Road and Wudaokou stations, crosses the North Fourth Ring Road and offers riders a captivating view of blooming peach blossoms—a moveable sea of flowers seems to flow past the windows, as if stepping into an animated world. The Jing-Zhang Railway Heritage Park, transformed from the original railway line built in the early 20th century, now serves as a lush green corridor, presenting a picturesque floral landscape interwoven with the natural beauty of the Western Hills. Peach blossoms thrive exuberantly along both sides of the tracks, showcasing hues that range from soft pink to pristine white. As the train moves along its route, the sea of flowers seems to move with it, allowing passengers to witness a unique blend of revived industrial heritage and the vibrant energy of springtime in full bloom.

**Option Five: Subway Line 14 for the Chinese Flowering Crabapples in Wangjing**

Adjacent to Wangjingnan Station on Subway Line 14 lies a striking stretch of Chinese flowering crabapples, extending for hundreds of metres

along a winding waterway. The riverbanks are lined with branches heavy with pink and white blossoms, blooming gracefully and elegantly at the water’s edge. Their delicate reflections ripple softly across the surface, adding a poetic touch to the sea of flowers that graces the ancient capital. A leisurely stroll through this area offers visitors a vivid sense of spring’s charm and beauty at nearly every turn. The space features clear, flowing water and meticulously maintained green landscaping, making it a popular and photogenic destination on social media.

**Option Six: Beijing Subway Yizhuang Line for Spring Landscapes along Hongda North Road**

Though Hongda North Road may not offer the most dramatic spring floral view, it presents a uniquely charming scene of its own during the season. The tall, densely planted paulownia trees lining both sides form a captivating corridor of colour. In April, their elegant pink-purple blossoms blanket the roadway, resembling a vibrant, intricately woven tapestry. This enchanting floral avenue becomes a must-see spring destination in Beijing. Beyond the paulownia blooms, a variety of other flowers embellish the roadside green belts, creating a richly layered and visually appealing landscape.

Springtime in Beijing offers a graceful journey: trains gliding through a sea of flowers. From the majestic mountains lining the railway tracks to the delicate gardens flanking the subway routes, each station becomes a gateway to a poetic spring outing.



Beijing Modern Tram Xijiao Line



Crabapple Blossom Creek in Wangjing





Spring blossoms by the Grand Canal at dusk

## Admiring Flowers by Boat

Spring has returned, and flowers are once again in bloom across the capital, creating a breathtaking visual spectacle. In this beautiful season, exploring the charm of Beijing's spring from a different perspective—by taking a boat to view the blossoms—offers an experience like on other.

### Blossoms around the Jade Islet

In the early morning, a delicate mist still hovers over the tranquil lake of Beihai Park. Pleasure boats glide across the mirror-like surface of the water, their movement gently disturbing the calm and creating ripples, offering passengers an unfolding view of the spring scenery gracing the shores. Along the western bank, pear blossoms shine brightly. Each bud holds a droplet of morning dew that glistens like a pearl, inspiring a sense of poetry. On the eastern shore, winter jasmines are in full bloom, their branches aglow with rich golden hues. These delicate blossoms, each no larger than a

thumb, appear finely carved, their semi-transparent petals glowing under the morning light. Perhaps most captivating of all are the hall crabapples at the foot of a small hill on Jade Islet, their layers of petals cascading gracefully toward the water's edge, resembling a pink waterfall swaying in the spring breeze. Peach blossoms are scattered across the Jade Islet and along the winding trails beside the lake, their pink and white blossoms echoing in harmony with the ancient architecture, calm waters and weathered rocks, reflecting the vibrancy of spring. In the distance, a sea of flowers further enhances the charm of the pavilions, terraces, pagodas and halls, offering a vivid reminder of the flourishing age of the ancient imperial families.

### Spring Flowers along the Changhe River

Taking a painted pleasure boat along the Kunyu River, passengers can admire the peach blossoms lining both banks. Branches heavy with colourful blooms lean toward the water, forming pink and white arches as their reflections meet on the surface. The

vibrant peach blossoms gradually shift from light pink to rosy red, each flower bearing five petals and shimmering stamens and pistils that resemble golden silk threads. As the boat turns into the South Changhe River, it enters a gently narrowing waterway flanked by willows with tender new leaves. At Guangyuan Watergate, stone beasts from the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) are gracefully adorned with fallen spring petals, making the timeworn figures appear softened and serene. At the dock near Wanshou Temple, the soft chime of a copper bell on the boat ripples across the calm water. On both sides of the river, lilac blossoms bloom, their graceful purple tones framing the temple's eaves, while their fragrance fills the air, blending gently with the temple's tranquil Sanskrit melodies.

### Bamboo Groves Accompanying Cherry Blossoms

As a pleasure boat passes a section of blue brick wall along the South Changhe River, the graceful beauty of Zizhuyuan Park gradually unfolds—like a spring overture composed of delicate pink cherry blossoms

and the lush green of tender bamboo groves. Pale pink peach blossom petals are carried by the soft breeze into the bamboo, with some drifting gently down onto the boat's deck. As the boat reaches Junshiyuan, the riverbank is suddenly lit with golden brilliance—a tapestry of weeping forsythia blossoms whose vibrant colour recalls freshly molten gold, and whose fragrance is as rich and lingering as fine wine. Just outside Lüyunxuan, Yulan magnolia blossoms bloom as full as white teacups, their semi-transparent petals gleaming in the sunlight. The dense bamboo groves lining both banks sway gently in the spring breeze, their rustling adding a quiet rhythm to the season's symphony. As the boat continues its journey, it creates soft ripples that stretch toward the riverbank, echoing the reflection of vivid blossoms and together composing a scene that is both poetic and picturesque.

### Blossoms along the Grand Canal in the Spring Breeze

Taking a pleasure boat along the Grand Canal offers a perfect way to enjoy the charm of spring blossoms. Departing from

the Canal Transport Dock, the waterway is lined with seasonal flowers such as refined Yulan magnolias, delicate winter jasmines and graceful peach blossoms swaying in the spring breeze. The peach blossoms, like soft pink fairies, dance gently in the breeze, captivating all who pass by. As the boat nears Liuyin Square, a jade-green island appears, its peach blossoms in full bloom—each as big as a bowl. With shades ranging from deep red to pale pink, the blossoms create a vivid scene, accompanied by white egrets gliding gracefully above. In the distance, the Dipankara Pagoda rises, conjuring images of ancient grain boats from the south arriving during spring's bloom. Perhaps the historic scenes of flowers, the pagoda and people sipping wine along the canal were even more picturesque than the view seen from the boat today.

### Boating to View Flowers in the Starry Night

As dusk falls, the Liangma River is transformed into a vibrant, moving spectacle. As a pleasure boat glides past the Solana Lifestyle Shopping Park, passengers are welcomed by hall crabapple trees with cascading blossoms, glowing with colour

and emitting a sweet fragrance, their petals tinted with the warm hues of sunset. Along both sides of the river, cherry blossoms are beautifully enhanced by LED light strips, adding a magical shimmer to the twilight scene. As the boat continues through Chaoyang Park, pink cherry blossoms along the lakeshore blend with the sound of jazz music, creating a mesmerising and elegant nocturne. Willows by the bridges, blossoms along the pathways, mirrored reflections on the water and boats drifting gently downstream all come together to capture the rich essence of spring along the river.

Springtime in Beijing is like a distinctive floral journey by boat through the ancient capital's waterways. From timeless imperial gardens and modern waterfront districts to historic water gates and vast, vibrant seas of blossoms, each river or lake presents its own unique and colourful spring vista. Gentle petals stretch open through the morning mist, later glowing under the vibrant sunlight, their soft hues revealing the season's charm. Delicate floral fragrances mingle with the enduring legacy of history, weaving together a captivating, flowing panorama that celebrates the full splendour of springtime in motion.



Peach blossom scenery by Kunming Lake at the Summer Palace





# Rediscovering Graceful Blossoms

Translated by Wang Wei Photos by Jiang Litian, Yao Yongmei,  
He Rong, Cao Bing, Tong Tianyi, Zhao Dechun

Beijing, as an ancient capital, has long been intertwined with the presence of flowers.

Many historical photos of Old Beijing depict flowers blooming in the grand imperial gardens, in the temple grounds behind towering walls and in the elegant courtyard houses of residents. Although it may be a bit more challenging to find their favourite flowers today, people's affection for them remains steadfast. They continue to seek out floral beauty, often beginning with the time-honoured tradition of flower-viewing in the ancient temples of the capital.

Flower-viewing is a refined pursuit, filled with a sense of ritual. Historically, Beijing's literati and scholars held flowers in high regard. Today, with a variety of renowned and exotic flora easily available throughout the city, people can choose to admire flowers not only in ancient temples, gardens and the former residences of luminaries, but also by exploring the poems and writings of literary figures in search of blossoms that live on eternally through text.

The enjoyment of flowers is not only an appreciation of beauty, but also an exploration of culture and history. As spring comes back to Beijing once again, let us follow in the footsteps of revered cultural luminaries, revive the enduring legend of spring and embark on a literary journey among fragrant blossoms.





Lilacs at Fayuan Temple

## Lilacs

### Beauty of Blossoms Mirrors the Moon's Reflection

In today's Beijing, spring transforms the city into a vibrant tapestry of flowers, making it feel like a grand garden. In Old Beijing, however, finding places to appreciate spring blossoms presented a challenge. At the time, cultural and historic sites served as the main venues for springtime floral appreciation. The ancient capital has long been celebrated for its deep cultural heritage. As such, admiring flowers has always meant more than simply enjoying their beauty—it also involves exploring the cultural and historical context surrounding them. Each flower species was carefully presented within a temple setting to highlight its unique characteristics and temperament, elevating flower-viewing into an elegant and cultivated pursuit.

Undoubtedly, the most renowned flower-viewing activity in Old Beijing was the viewing of lilacs at Fayuan Temple. Each year, as spring blossoms emerged, throngs of visitors would gather at the temple to immerse themselves in the sea of lilacs that blanketed its grounds.

The lilac blossoms, with their soft light-

purple hue, have long been beloved by scholars and poets. Since the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), Fayuan Temple has enchanted visitors with its breathtaking lilac scenery. In ancient times, as the flowers came into bloom, people would gather at the temple to compose poems and prose, giving rise to the Lilac Poetry Fair. After the reigns of Emperor Kangxi (1661–1722) and Emperor Qianlong (1735–1796) of the Qing Dynasty, Fayuan Temple became widely celebrated in the capital for its flower-viewing traditions. Leading members of the famous

Xuannan Poetry Society—including the Qing-era scholars Ji Xiaolan (1724–1805), Gong Zizhen (1792–1841) and Lin Zexu (1785–1850)—frequently took part in the Lilac Poetry Fair, crafting elegant verses inspired by the occasion. Lin, who is well-known for his pivotal role in the anti-opium campaign at Humen, noted in his diary on the 7th day of the fourth lunar month in the 21st year of Emperor Jiaqing's reign (1816): "After departing the inner city en route to visit a friend, I stopped by Fayuan Temple to admire the Chinese flowering crabapple



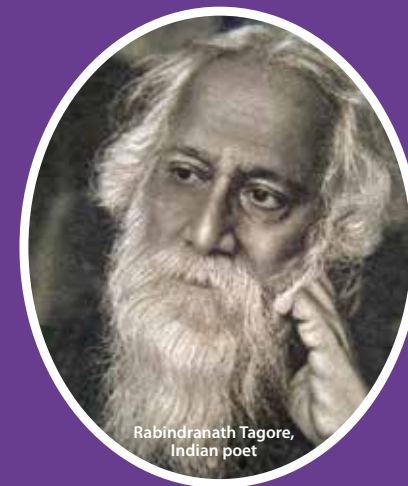
Photographing blooming lilacs at Fayuan Temple

and lilac blossoms." Undoubtedly, his words provide a clear testimony to the temple's fame for blooming lilacs and Chinese flowering crabapples during that era.

In the past, Fayuan Temple was a major venue where Beijing's luminaries welcomed distinguished foreign guests. In April 1924, the esteemed Indian cultural icon Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) arrived in Beijing. Accompanied by Xu Zhimo (1897–1931), Lin Huiyin (1904–1955) and Liang Sicheng (1901–1972), Tagore visited Fayuan Temple to admire its blooming lilacs. During this visit, Tagore, Xu and Lin posed for a group photo in the temple grounds. The image later gained widespread popularity and became known as the "Three Friends of Winter," a reference to the pine, bamboo and plum blossom—traditional symbols of perseverance and nobility in Chinese culture.

On that particular day, under the gentle spring sunlight, the lilacs at Fayuan Temple were in full bloom, their sweet fragrance enveloping everyone who passed by. Captivated by the scene, Tagore was filled with delight and chose to stay until late into the night. He immersed himself in poetry, composed verses and sipped tea beneath the moonlit, flower-scented air, with Xu keeping him company.

In the late hours of the night, Xu draped a prepared coat over Tagore. Setting down the porcelain cup he was holding, Tagore softly murmured, "What game are you playing, entangling my heart with a hundred love nooses? But where does love reside? You conceal yourself in your opulent splendour, laughing loudly, while I weep in solitude." Then, gesturing to Xu with a smile, he said, "It's your turn." Xu nodded without hesitation. He picked up a fallen branch, gently tapped the tea cup and recited in rhythm: "This long night is tough. I long to leave, but how? Please urge him to return quickly, don't waste your precious youth. Maybe a little casual drink? Let's



Rabindranath Tagore,  
Indian poet

drink, a bit tipsy, a bit bitter, and revel in a joyful life. Don't mock me for adorning flowers at my age. Am I the only one getting older, or is spring aging too?" Tagore was impressed and said, "This poem is truly exquisite. Please transcribe it for me later." Xu replied, "I didn't compose it. It's an ancient poem by one of China's Song Dynasty (AD 960–1279) female poets, Li Qingzhao (1084–1155). I simply translated it into English on a whim. If you appreciate it, I will select more and transcribe them for you." "Great. It's my turn again. After I finish mine, I'll listen to yours." And so, sipping tea, Tagore and Xu took turns composing verses. A poem, then a sip... Beneath the moonlight and the fragrance of Chinese flowering crabapples, they recited poetry until the stars faded and the eastern sky began to brighten.

Today, the Lilac Poetry Fair at Fayuan Temple continues. Each year, as the lilacs bloom again, visitors from near and far gather at the temple, joining the festivities amidst the fragrant blossoms.

## Peonies

### The Flowering Season That Captivates the Capital

Although Chongxiao Temple no longer stands, the peonies that once thrived within its grounds have fortunately endured. They were carefully relocated to Zhongshan Park, allowing the public to admire the very same blooms that once adorned the temple—one of the four major flower-viewing sites. In its time, Chongxiao Temple was widely renowned for its magnificent peonies, which were arranged in seemingly endless arrays. Among the standout varieties were the Weizi and Yaohuang, noted for their extraordinary size and brilliant colour, outshining other peonies in the capital and even surpassing those in the imperial gardens. Peonies with green or dark petals are especially rare. According to legend, the famed "deep purple with black" variety, which gained national acclaim, was represented by only two remaining specimens during the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of







Spring blossoms at Prince Kung's Mansion

China period (1911–1949)—one at Faxiang Temple by West Lake in Hangzhou, the other at Chongxiao Temple in Beijing, making it especially precious. In late spring, when flower viewing peaked, visitors from all over the country flocked to Chongxiao Temple to witness the rare beauty of black and green peonies in bloom. To meet the overwhelming demand, the Beining Railway Bureau even arranged a special train for the occasion, fulfilling the wishes of travellers from afar to behold these remarkable flowers.

During the Republic of China period, the peonies of Chongxiao Temple retained their celebrated status across the capital. The renowned writer Lu Xun (1881–1936), who was typically indifferent to garden outings, made a rare exception in 1913 when he visited the temple with his friend, the professional writer Xu Shoushang (1883–1948). Their trip was made with the specific intention of viewing the peonies. Lu Xun recorded the experience in his diary: “In

the afternoon, I went to Chongxiao Temple with Xu Shoushang to admire peonies, but they were already fading.”

Upon visiting Chongxiao Temple, the renowned scholar Zhang Zhongxing (1909–2006) was struck by the sight of the flourishing peonies. Curious about the secret behind their success, he asked a resident monk for the temple's method of cultivation. The monk replied plainly that the key was to apply a large amount of fertiliser—referred to as “big fat”—before winter arrived. This “big fat” was made from pork heads and pig organs, all stewed until extremely soft and tender. Zhang was taken aback by this revelation, remarking on how unexpectedly elegance and vulgarity could be so closely intertwined.

During the 1950s, Chongxiao Temple fell into disrepair, and as a result, the once-celebrated peonies began to wither. Concerned by the decline of such extraordinary blooms, calligrapher Ye Gonghuo (1881–1968) proposed to the People's Government of Beijing Municipality that the peonies be relocated to a garden within Zhongshan Park. The suggestion was approved. Zhongshan Park already featured an extensive peony garden previously established by Zhu Qiqian (1872–1964), and the addition of the temple's peonies made the floral spectacle more accessible to the public. Today, every time the peonies blossom, crowds gather in great numbers. Although visitors may still spot dark purple and black varieties among



Lu Xun

the display, the original dark-petalled peony from Chongxiao Temple—once the talk of the capital—likely eludes recognition. For those wishing to explore the artistic spirit of these blooms, inspiration can be drawn from the paintings of Chen Shizeng (1876–1923), a master of modern Chinese art who frequented the temple almost every year to admire the flowers, often accompanied by colleagues from the Beijing Fine Art Academy. His enduring legacy includes numerous vivid peony paintings rendered in the traditional Chinese style.

## Chinese Flowering Crabapples

### Gorgeous Blooms Even Dazzle at Night

Chongxiao Temple, once a vibrant destination during peak blooming season, has now been transformed into Baizhifang Elementary School, with only a scripture hall and a few scattered stone carvings remaining as traces of its past. Like Chongxiao Temple, another ancient temple in Beijing once renowned for its floral displays but no longer exists—the Temple of Flowers. At one time, it enjoyed widespread fame for its spectacular Chinese flowering crabapple blossoms, attracting admirers from all over the capital.

Ling Shuhua (1900–1990), a notable modern Chinese writer, once described the Chinese flowering crabapples at the Temple of Flowers—an experience that left a lasting impression on her. So deeply moved, she even titled the collection of her novels *Temple of Flowers*. However, by the time she was writing, the temple had already fallen into decline, and the variety she wrote about had become so scarce that only a single specimen remained.

The Temple of Flowers stood outside the former Fengyimen Gate, in what is now the You'anmen area of Beijing. Each spring, the temple's prolific Chinese flowering crabapples would bloom in abundance, drawing scholars and officials from across the capital to admire them—including the famed Qing Dynasty poet Gong Zizhen.

He held a deep affection for Beijing's flowering crabapple trees. In his *Jihai Miscellaneous Poems*, two pieces specifically recall the blossoms of the capital. One note accompanying 208th poem—titled “Remembering the flowering crabapple trees planted by Dong Gao (1740–1818) in the Temple of Flowers outside Fengyimen Gate”—makes clear that he was referring to those grown at the temple.

Gong had possessed a penchant for socialising since his youth. Following his success in the imperial examination, his social network expanded even further. During that era, there existed a popular literary community in the capital city called the Xuannan Poetry Society, named after its gathering place situated south of Xuanwumen Gate. At the beginning, the members of the society would gather to drink, compose poetry, appreciate flowers and paintings, study ancient steles and engage in intellectual discussions. The literati held a deep fondness for such gatherings

that blended elegance with insight. Gong, for example, frequently attended literary parties beneath blooming trees with his friends. At the Temple of Flowers, Gong and his companions would open finely patterned windows, allowing the mottled bamboo curtains to hang gently on all sides, while outside, the Chinese flowering crabapple trees bloomed in brilliant colour. This refined and peaceful setting was perfectly suited to the tastes of such distinguished scholars. At one particular gathering, held in the 16th year of Emperor Daoguang's reign (1836), Gong, in a state of drunken joy, composed a poem entitled “Remembering the Vertical Bamboo Flute Performance on the Phoenix Terrace.”

The gatherings at the Temple of Flowers and the meetings of the Xuannan Poetry Society were more than mere occasions for enjoying blooming flowers, drinking and composing poetry. At that time, forward-thinking intellectuals with reformist aspirations used such events as platforms to share ideas, debate political matters, criticise

entrenched conservatism and advocate for change in various areas. They harnessed a significant social force of public opinion and played a pivotal role in driving substantial changes in the prevailing circumstances. Though the famous Chinese flowering crabapples at the Temple of Flowers no longer exist, the most well-known midget crabapples in Beijing continue to bloom in the grand courtyard of Prince Kung's Mansion. Dating back to the Qing Dynasty, when Prince Kung Yixin (1833–1898) resided there, a literary legend surrounding the blossom appreciation beneath these graceful midget crabapples emerged and gradually gained popularity in the capital.

During the height of the later Chinese flowering crabapple appreciation events at Prince Kung's Mansion, Chen Yuan (1880–1971), then president of Fu Jen Catholic University, invited scholars from across the capital to gather at the mansion, following the tradition of their literary forebears by reciting poetry and writing essays. This led to the



Flowering Chinese crabapple blossoms at Prince Kung's Mansion



establishment of the Flowering Crabapple Poetry Society. Cultural figures such as Wang Guowei (1877–1927), Yu Jiaxi (1884–1956), Chen Yinke (1890–1969), Lu Xun, Gu Sui (1897–1960), Zhang Boju (1898–1982), Shen Yinmo (1883–1971), Qi Gong (1912–2005) and Zhou Ruchang (1918–2012) assembled there—forming friendships, sharing poetry and inspiring new literary creations.

Amidst the tumultuous times, the Flowering Crabapple Poetry Society gradually waned. It was not until 2010 that the esteemed scholar Zhou Ruchang proposed reviving the literary gathering at Prince Kung's Mansion. The following spring, inspired by Zhou's suggestion, the mansion resumed hosting the poetry society after a long pause. With the event's revival, prominent scholars once again gathered each year, restoring the site's historical charm.

Among the many attendees, one distinguished figure stood out—Ye Jiaying (1924–2024), a renowned scholar of classical literature. Though over 90 years old when Ye first attended the

gathering in 2014, she radiated vitality and vigour. Her connection to the event dated back decades. In 1941, at the age of 17, Ye was admitted to Fu Jen Catholic University, whose women's campus was then located in Prince Kung's Mansion. With the revival of the poetry society, Ye saw a cherished dream fulfilled. Wearing a long purple robe, she stood by the stage of the grand theatre tower, gently placing her hand on the railing as she recited a new composition for the poetry society—"Chant of Water Dragon"—in her unique tone. Her voice, like a soft spring breeze, drifted through the air. The poetic beauty lingered among the flowering crabapple trees, echoing in the hearts of the audience long after the final verse.

## Yulan Magnolias

### Creating a Serene and Graceful Ambience

When it comes to early spring blossoms in Beijing, Yulan magnolias are



Ji Xianlin  
in his late years

among the most prominent. On the east side of Pilu Pavilion in Tanzhe Temple grow two trees known as "Er Qiao Yulan," or "Sisters Qiao Yulan Magnolias," with a history tracing back more than four centuries to the Ming Dynasty. These magnolias produce large blooms, each with nine petals in a striking blend of white and purple. Their delicate beauty often brings to mind the two famous

daughters of Duke Qiao of the Wu Kingdom (AD 222–280) during the Three Kingdoms period (AD 220–280), Senior Qiao and Junior Qiao. The magnolias at Tanzhe Temple are thus named in honour of the sisters. As a distinctive feature of the temple, these rare and precious flowers are highly regarded in the ancient capital.

Equally renowned is the ancient Yulan magnolia at Dajue Temple. Alongside the lilacs at Fayuan Temple and the peonies at Chongxiao Temple, the magnolia in front of Siyi Hall of Dajue Temple has long been considered one of Beijing's three major springtime scenic attractions, hailed as the "best magnolia in Beijing." The graceful floral setting of Dajue Temple has earned it the poetic title "ancient temple with the fragrance of magnolia." Siyi Hall was closely associated with Emperor Yongzheng (reign: 1722–1735) of the Qing Dynasty, who held it in high regard and named it after his own study in the urban areas. The 300-year-old magnolia in front of the hall is said to have ties to both the emperor and his mentor, Master Jialing (1671–1726). Historians believe that Master Jialing personally planted the tree while serving as abbot of Dajue Temple. Before his appointment in Beijing, Jialing had served as abbot of Li'an Temple in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, for three years. Upon arriving in the capital, he brought the magnolia from Hangzhou to Dajue Temple as a symbol of continuing the dharma lineage. Empress Dowager Cixi (regency: 1861–1908), who rarely inscribed characters, is said to have left a three-character inscription at the temple in connection with this magnolia. According to legend, the empress dowager, known by the nickname Yulan, during a spring visit, was deeply moved by the sight of the magnolia—then over 10 metres tall—and left her inscription in tribute.

The ancient Yulan magnolia at Dajue Temple continued to draw admiration from writers and literary masters well into the 20th century. In April 1934, during the idyllic hiking season between the



Weeping forsythias at Dajue Temple

Qingming and Grain Rain (Chinese solar terms), Hu Shi (1891–1962), accompanied by his wife Jiang Dongxiu (1890–1975), their son Hu Sidu (1921–1957) and others, travelled to the outskirts of Beijing to enjoy the spring blossoms. At Dajue Temple, Hu Shi encountered an old friend who happened to be visiting as well. Standing together beneath the magnolia tree, the two engaged in a long conversation, marvelling at the tree's famed jade-like blossoms. Its branches were short and gently curved, each tipped with a delicate bloom. At that moment, hundreds of fragrant, jade-white flowers had burst into bloom, creating a breathtaking and serene spectacle. Hu's friend captured the memory by photographing him standing beneath the ancient magnolia tree."

Likewise, the renowned literary figure Ji Xianlin (1911–2009) expressed his deep appreciation for the ancient Yulan magnolia at Dajue Temple. In the early 1980s, one spring day, upon learning that the tree had entered its prime blooming season, Ji cycled to the temple. Once inside, he was greeted by several magnolias blooming in the North Yulan Courtyard and the majestic "King of Magnolias" flourishing in the South

Yulan Courtyard. The visit left a lasting impression on Ji. In 1999, he published an essay titled "Dajue Temple," in which he recalled, "Sometimes I think of Dajue Temple for no reason, where the verdant pines, cypresses, magnolias and vines fascinated me." Ji also described the ancient magnolia in vivid detail, writing: "At this moment, the ancient magnolia was in full bloom, with blossoms clustering densely and weighing down its branches. In contrast, there was a relatively young purple magnolia tree. The two trees, one white and one purple, complemented each other gracefully. The infinite vitality of the earth appeared to gush out with the gorgeous blossoms."

Indeed, for many literati and scholars, Dajue Temple remains a pristine sanctuary within their innermost thoughts. Through their literary works, they have immortalised the blossoms of this ancient temple, passing down the stories of Old Beijing's flowers to people today and enriching the cultural fabric of the ancient capital. Around the time of the Spring Equinox, the annual tradition of Yulan magnolia appreciation at the city's historic sites has become a cherished experience for many, forming a seasonal event eagerly anticipated by visitors each year.



Yulan magnolia blossoms at Tanzhe Temple





Chinese wisteria flowers at Guozijian

## Chinese Wisterias

### Appreciating the Height of Earthly Elegance

Like Yulan magnolia blossoms, Chinese wisteria flowers have long held a special place in the hearts of literary figures and scholars within traditional Chinese culture. With their distinctive and winding forms, wisterias often inspire thoughts of artistic imagination and literary expression. As recorded in the *Classic of Flowers*: “Wisterias climb up from the edge of the wood, with slender vines entwined around the trees. Observing their curved and winding forms, they bear a resemblance to dragons concealed amidst the waves.” During the Qing Dynasty, the Xuannan area—corresponding to the region south of today’s Xuanwumen—became a gathering place for scholars. As a result, many of the area’s famed wisterias were vividly portrayed in the writings of prominent cultural figures.

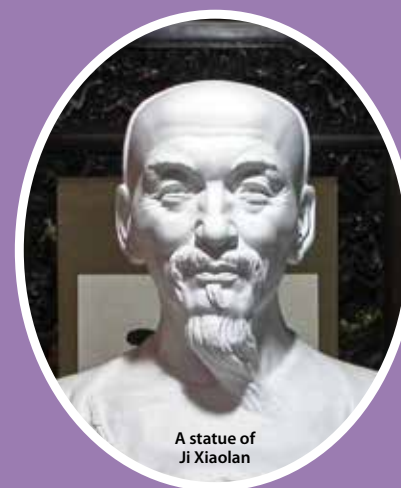
During the reign of Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty, two luminaries resided in Haibai Hutong (also referred to as Haibo

Hutong), located outside what is now the Xuannan area. One was the distinguished literary figure Zhu Yizun (1629–1709), and the other was the accomplished playwright Kong Shangren (1648–1718). Both shared a fervent appreciation and enthusiasm for Chinese wisterias. Zhu, known as the author of the esteemed book *Hearsay of Old Matters from under the Sun*, named his study within his residence “Old Vine Study,” taking inspiration from an ancient wisteria vine that he had personally planted just outside his window. Zhu shared a close friendship with Cao Yin (1658–1712), the grandfather of celebrated Cao Xueqin (1715–1763), author of the classic Chinese novel *A Dream of Red Mansions*. At that time, Cao Yin held an official position in the imperial court and played a key role in sponsoring the publication of Zhu’s *Hearsay of Old Matters from under the Sun*.

Similarly, an ancient Chinese wisteria vine once adorned the area in front of Kong Shangren’s study. He named his study “Hall on the Shore,” and once composed a poem that read: “Haibo Hutong, a serene space, just contains Hall on the Shore with a

wisteria vine.” During the reign of Emperor Kangxi, a widely accepted viewpoint circulated among scholars and the general public alike, which claimed that “Regardless of the number of plays from the Yuan Dynasty that had survived until the present day, the theatrical works of Kong Shangren and Hong Sheng (1645–1704) dominated the stages of the capital.” At that time, two particularly celebrated scripts emerged: one was Hong’s *Palace of Eternal Life*, and the other was Kong’s *Peach Blossom Fan*, which together came to be known as the famous “theatrical works of Kong and Hong.” Furthermore, the widely acclaimed *Peach Blossom Fan* was, in fact, written by Kong himself while seated beneath the blooming wisteria tree just outside his study window. It’s not difficult to imagine the wealth of inspiration that the elegant, ancient vine must have bestowed upon the gifted playwright.

Regrettably, the Chinese wisterias that once adorned the residences of both Zhu and Kong no longer stand today. However, the most renowned wisteria in Beijing, which has endured through the



A statue of Ji Xiaolan

ages, continues to flourish at the former residence of Ji Xiaolan, located on the northeastern side of Hufangqiao. This enduring vine was planted by Ji himself, one of the most celebrated scholars of the Qing Dynasty. In spring, upon approaching Ji’s former residence—before even stepping through the gate—visitors are greeted by a dense wisteria trellis arching over the courtyard entrance. This canopy filters the sunlight and casts a delicate pattern of dappled shadows across the grey brick path beneath. Originally, the wisteria was not planted before the gate as it is now, but within the inner courtyard. Ji’s original residence was a sprawling courtyard compound comprising three sub-courtyards and adjoining side yards. Today, only two sub-courtyards remain, occupying less than one-third of the estate’s original footprint. Yet despite the loss of much of the complex, the main structures are still well preserved.

Ji held a particular fondness for the Chinese wisteria growing in his courtyard. In his celebrated work *Notes on the Yuewei Cottage*, he wrote with enthusiasm: “Its shade covers the courtyard, its vines gracefully stretches, the flowers, like purple clouds, hang suspended above the ground and its fragrance delicately lingers in the air.” Later, cultural luminaries such as Mei Lanfang (1894–1961) and Zhang Boju, deeply admiring Ji, developed a reverence for both the scholar and his residence—and, by extension, for the wisteria itself. The ancient

vine has attracted countless expressions of affection over the years. Each May, when its blossoms burst into bloom in a lush cascade of green and violet, it continues a cycle of splendour that has lasted more than two hundred years. Renowned calligraphers and painters from all over Beijing have long gathered here to sketch and celebrate the wisteria’s beauty. The famous writer Lao She (1899–1966) also came to admire the blossoms. During his first visit, he noticed Jinyang Restaurant next door and chose a table by a south-facing window in the front yard, allowing him to dine while enjoying a clear view of the flowers. Inspired by the experience, he composed a lyric: “So much fragrance enchants the patrons in the spring breeze; gratitude is owed to the wisteria flowers gracing the front of the courtyard,” capturing the charm of the moment in verse.

During the peak blooming season of the Chinese wisteria, countless visitors flock to Ji’s former residence to admire the abundant clusters of blossoms cascading elegantly from the branches. Looking back through history, it was under this

very canopy of wisteria that Ji would sit at ease, leisurely enjoying his long-stemmed pipe while painstakingly compiling the monumental *Complete Library in the Four Branches of Literature*. As a soft breeze stirs the air, the blossoms flutter gently, creating the illusion of a falling floral waterfall, while their captivating fragrance permeates the air and carries far into the distance.

Many famous flowering plants in the capital, which once served as companions to so many, continue to flourish in some cases, while in others, they have sadly vanished from sight. Flowers, by nature, follow a cycle of blooming and withering, and their lifespans are ultimately limited. However, thanks to the elegant verses composed by celebrated scholars in the presence of these blossoms, along with their artistic impulse to capture their beauty in ink, the spirit of these flowers has been preserved in both floral appreciation gatherings and timeless artistic creations. As a result, people today can still sense and savour a fragrance that transcends the passage of time.



Chinese wisteria flowers at the Former Residence of Ji Xiaolan





# Preserving the Beauty of Spring

Translated by Wang Wei Photos by Zhang Xin, Cao Bing

With the arrival of spring, Beijing comes alive with elegance, transforming into a veritable garden city. The seasonal scenery reaches its peak, bursting with vibrant colours, and major parks across the city are hosting a wide variety of spring blossom festivals. These engaging events combine the natural beauty of flowers with elements of culture, tradition and modern creativity, awakening a deep appreciation and renewed anticipation for the splendour of spring. Beyond simply admiring the expansive floral displays, visitors can also preserve the fleeting charm of the season by purchasing thoughtfully designed cultural and creative products that capture its unique qualities.

However, the splendour and magnificence of spring extend far beyond the mere sight of blooming flowers. Throughout Beijing's major museums, a wide array of exquisite artificial bonsai, graceful porcelain artworks, dazzling embroidery meticulously crafted on garments, and delicate stone carvings intricately capture and showcase the enchanting beauty of spring. These extraordinary artistic treasures eloquently express the ancients' profound admiration and heartfelt affection for the season, skilfully transforming fleeting scenes of spring's prosperity into enduring and memorable impressions.



## Conveying Emotions through Floral Art

Within the collection of artificial bonsai on display at the Treasure Gallery in the Palace Museum, one plum blossom bonsai—featuring gold-plated silver filigree and adorned with pearls and gemstones—stands out for its exceptional brilliance. This exquisite piece consists of a rectangular pot and a meticulously crafted plum blossom tree. Its leaves are ingeniously fashioned from gilded slivers embellished with shimmering Eurasian kingfisher feathers, and the blossoms are crafted with jewels, including pearls, rubies, tourmalines and jadeites, resulting in a truly breathtaking effect. The bonsai is embellished with nearly 300 pearls and gemstones in total. Spring in Beijing has long been noted for its brevity. In an effort to preserve its beauty, the skilled artisans of the Imperial Workshop, which was under the Imperial Household Department during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911)—painstakingly created “a

garden impervious to fading” by making a variety of artificial bonsai using precious materials such as gold, silver and white jade-like corals. The flowers within these bonsai are remarkably lifelike and transcend the constraints of the seasons, enabling the emperor and his imperial harem within the Forbidden City to enjoy the vibrant atmosphere of spring throughout the year.

Artificial bonsai served not merely as cherished treasures of the imperial court but also as favoured collectables among the aristocratic class. Throughout the Qing Dynasty, the creation of a single exquisite artificial bonsai often required several months, or even years. Craftspeople had to meticulously select appropriate materials and then reproduce the natural world’s inherent beauty through the application of realistic carving techniques. As a result, these artistic works transcend the notion of simple decorative ornaments, instead serving as profound reflections of the cultural and technological advancements that characterised the era in which they

were made. By observing these ever-blooming creations, contemporary visitors gain insight into the ancients’ deep reverence for nature and their enduring pursuit of the highest expressions of beauty.

In contrast to the lifelike artificial bonsai preserved within the Forbidden City, a famille rose gourd-shaped vase adorned with 100 blossom motifs and from the collection of the National Museum of China, showcases refined porcelain painting techniques specifically employed to recreate the flourishing springtime. This porcelain vase adopts a traditional Chinese artistic approach, characterised by the depiction of a multitude of flowers while deliberately avoiding any exposed background—a method in which the entire surface of the vase is filled with layered floral imagery. The result is a seamless composition without any empty space, all serving to highlight the desired visual impact of a splendid and extremely beautiful spring.

Looking closely at the vase, visitors are treated to a carefully arranged display of vibrant blossoms. Each individual flower symbolises a good wish and seems to tell a story of the imperial court’s pursuit of a perfect vision of spring. This ultimate expression of artificial aesthetics, devoted to capturing the essence of nature, stands as a powerful testament to the remarkable heights achieved by ancient Chinese arts and crafts.

Famille rose porcelain first emerged during the reign of Emperor Kangxi (1661–1722) and later reached its zenith during the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1735–1796), representing the absolute pinnacle of porcelain firing techniques achieved throughout the Qing Dynasty. Among these masterpieces, a gourd-shaped vase featuring 100 flower motifs stands out, symbolising enduring peace, abundant wealth and boundless continuity of life. Emperor Qianlong held a profound affection for the preservation of antiques and demonstrated a refined ability to seamlessly incorporate

traditional Chinese aesthetic principles into his daily life. Within the Hall of Three Rarities (San Xi Tang), which was his personal study inside the Hall of Mental Cultivation, visitors can admire more than a dozen antique vases suspended along the surrounding walls. These exquisite pieces, crafted from an impressive range of materials including bronze, jade and porcelain, contain delicately arranged flowers and leaves fashioned from gemstones. These vases transcend their function as simple decorative objects, and instead serving as refined artistic expressions that mirror the emperor’s vision of an eternal spring.

The decorative style exemplified by this genre of wall vase extended its influence into the imperial harem. The formal ritual attire worn by Emperor Qianlong’s empress and imperial concubines was also embellished with vase-themed ornamentation. For example, a light green embroidered satin long gown adorned with floral patterns is currently preserved in the collection of the Palace Museum, showcasing eight embroidered combinations of vases with floral arrangements. These include a bronze vase with ornate beast-shaped handles holding vibrant peonies, and a classic blue and white vase with tubular handles containing plum blossoms, all collectively symbolising wealth and auspiciousness for the wearer.

In addition to the porcelain and bonsai that together present a visual feast of springtime, embroidery served a more practical role, offering wearers a tangible sense of spring’s gentle warmth and comforting presence. Among the Palace Museum’s collection, a resplendent pink costume dating back to the reign of Emperor Kangxi, adorned with embroidered silk floral and butterfly patterns, stands as a stunning example of spring brought to life on fabric. This garment is meticulously crafted from pink gauze and embroidered with a rich array of blossoms, including peach, pear, crabapple and winter jasmine blossoms, alongside an abundance of peonies and other floral varieties. The costume is further embellished with a scattering of vibrantly coloured butterflies and birds. Notably, it



Part of a famille rose gourd-shaped vase with 100 blossom motifs

features intricate embroidery techniques combined with vivid hues, creating the impression of a lively, moving floral scene that reflects the golden age of the Qing imperial family.

Among the Palace Museum’s collection is another exquisite embroidery masterpiece from the reign of Emperor Qianlong—a colourful, cotton-wadded satin robe adorned with 100 intricately embroidered butterflies and floral patterns. This particular robe is made of satin fabric and exquisitely decorated with peonies, orchids, chrysanthemums and butterfly motifs, all created using *zhuanghua*, a traditional Chinese brocade-weaving technique. The robe is crafted in the *nianjin* style, which involves using thin ropes to connect the two separate panels that form the front of a traditional Chinese robe. It is further distinguished by its horseshoe-shaped sleeves, which lend an air of elegance and fluid motion. The collar and cuffs are inlaid with dark reddish-brown cloud, dragon and sea water motifs along the edges, further emphasising the use of the *zhuanghua* technique and highlighting the nobility and exceptional craftsmanship characteristic of imperial attire.

The embellishment of the robe, while undeniably graceful, avoids excessive complexity, reflecting the harmony of its carefully chosen colours. More than 20 shades, ranging from moon-white and stone-blue to pink-red and purple-red, have been artfully interwoven, together presenting a vivid tapestry of springtime. Even after more than two centuries, the robe still retains its brilliant colours and exquisite detailing, standing as a testament to both the exceptional quality of the materials used and the remarkable embroidery techniques perfected during the Qing Dynasty.

The essence of springtime in the ancient capital is preserved not only within the exhibits of the city’s museums, but also deeply etched into the bricks and tiles of its enduring architecture. Within the Forbidden City, the Garden of the Palace of Tranquil Longevity served as a specially designed retreat, envisioned by Emperor Qianlong as a sanctuary for his later years. Located at the garden’s northernmost point, the Studio of Weary Diligence stands as a testament to the emperor’s personal vision. It is widely regarded as a dreamlike haven of extraordinary opulence and splendour. Adjacent to the studio, on its western side, is a theatre with a compact



A plum blossom bonsai featuring gold-plated silver filigree, adorned with pearls and gemstones





A long and thin red silk gown with embroidered wisteria flower and butterfly motifs

stage where eunuchs would perform for the emperor's entertainment. Surrounding this stage is a monumental trompe l'oeil mural that nearly covers the entire space. It ingeniously employs Western perspective painting techniques to depict peonies, cranes, birds and mountains, creating an astonishingly immersive panoramic scene.

The area above the stage is adorned with a painted ceiling that depicts an entire vine trellis overflowing with blooming blue-purple flowers. When an observer stands at a specific point directly in front of the stage and looks upward, the blossoms appear to cascade downward from the vine, creating a marvellously vivid illusion of three-dimensional depth.

The decorative motifs found in local architecture further enrich the unfolding narrative of Beijing's enduring affection for the beauty of flowers. Zhihua Temple,

first constructed during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), is celebrated for its refined architectural character, particularly the exquisitely crafted caisson ceiling in its main hall, which features intricate rolled grass designs. These motifs symbolise the continuity of life and the renewal of all living things, serving as distinctive emblems of spring. Likewise, the White Cloud Temple, a revered Taoist site, features interwoven floral patterns on its lintels. These patterns symbolise good fortune, auspicious circumstances and lasting longevity—echoing the vitality and growth of spring. These architectural embellishments not only enhance the aesthetic appeal of their surroundings, but also reflect the aspirations and blessings of the people for a more prosperous life.

The residents of Beijing love flowers. In their view, floral imagery offers a form of spiritual nourishment, intricately woven

into their history, memories and emotions. To prolong the presence of blossoms and lush growth beyond the limitations of the natural seasons, the people of the ancient capital have adorned their tiles with floral motifs, allowing the beauty of flowers to radiate year-round from their homes. As an essential element of ancient architectural design, tiles with graceful patterns often reflect the cultural values and aesthetic preferences of the era in which they were created. The interlaced floral designs symbolise life's continuity and flourishing prosperity, which is expressed through the enduring strength of intertwined branches and the vibrant bloom of lotus flowers. These crafted details, often quietly nestled within the city's traditional hutongs, may be easy to overlook, yet they continue to tell the story of Beijing's enduring love and reverence for springtime across the ages.

At the East Huashi Community Museum, time appears to stand still within the delicate arrangements of silk flowers. Among the displays, one bonsai featuring pristine white Yulan magnolia blossoms stands out in particular, capturing the viewer's attention.

Each petal in this exhibit displays a vivid and remarkably lifelike quality, capturing the magnolia blossom's journey from its early bud to full bloom, with distinct layers and finely detailed features. Every petal is handcrafted by a skilled artisan, its curvature individually adjusted to reflect the various stages of the flower's unfolding process. The most astonishing aspect of this work lies in the meticulous layering of each blossom. Jin Tieling, the master artisan behind this piece, used tweezers to attach each successive layer of petals, faithfully replicating the intricate structure of real magnolia flowers. The resulting artificial blooms are rendered with such exquisite beauty that they appear to exude the fragrance of spring itself, radiating a timeless charm that will never fade.

In early spring, along with magnolia and plum blossoms, late-spring peonies are intricately crafted into Beijing-styled silk flowers to preserve their beauty.

Inside the museum, a variety of silk flower exhibits—including chrysanthemums, plum blossoms, magnolia blossoms and roses—are displayed, featuring lifelike forms and vibrant colours. Through the skilled hands of craftsmen, the spirit of spring is captured and preserved. Much like the charm of Beijing-styled silk flowers, traditional handicrafts in Beijing have long immortalised the fleeting essence of spring in artistic form. Passed down from ancient times to the present-day, this tradition stands as a significant representation of Chinese intangible cultural heritage.

Within the Palace Museum's collection of lacquerware, there is a foot pedal adorned with carved red peony motifs from the reign of Emperor Yongle (1402–1424) of the Ming Dynasty. It serves as a striking example of traditional Chinese lacquer artistry. The upper section of the pedal features seven blooming peonies, meticulously crafted by Ming Dynasty artisans. On closer inspection, viewers can admire the finely carved layers of petals, each rendered with delicate precision. The pedal also includes additional floral motifs such as camellias, chrysanthemums, pomegranate blossoms and gardenias, all intricately carved to convey a natural elegance. This lacquerware masterpiece goes beyond mere craftsmanship, resembling a vibrant garden brought to life.

As a traditional craft of Beijing, cloisonné is celebrated for its vivid colours. It skilfully infuses the essence of spring into its copper base and glazed surfaces, creating a brilliance reminiscent of blooming flowers.

Among the many cloisonné pieces, an incense burner with three legs adorned with intertwined floral designs stands out as a quintessential example of the art form. Shaped like a bronze tripod, the main body of the burner features 12 white chrysanthemum motifs on the upper section and six interlaced lotus patterns on the lower part. Every detail is meticulously crafted with fine copper wire and vibrant glazes. The delicate carving of each lotus petal

produces a captivating effect, as if the petals are dancing in the interplay of light and shadow.

Another finely crafted cloisonné enamel vase from the Ming Dynasty imperial court is adorned with floral motifs, capturing the essence of spring through its elegant colours and intricate patterns. The vase features smooth, delicate lines that have been meticulously polished to a mirror-like finish. While the decorative motifs are detailed, they are arranged with exceptional refinement, ensuring a balanced and harmonious composition. The vivid designs of plum blossoms, chrysanthemums, gardenias and other flowers display bright, vibrant hues, with each petal layer distinctly rendered as if in full bloom, imbuing the artefact with a lively spirit of spring.

Amidst the vibrant spring landscape of Beijing, a radiant golden brilliance emerges—the art of filigree inlay. This intricate technique skilfully combines delicate gold wires with precious gemstones, capturing the dynamic energy of blooming flowers in each artistic creation. A striking example is a gold inlaid jewellery piece from the Qing Dynasty, shaped like a round flower and housed in the collection of the Palace Museum. The golden base is adorned with emeralds, rubies and pearls, forming layers of rich colour and shimmering brilliance. Each emerald, crystal-clear and verdant in hue, evokes the spirit of spring, encapsulating its vitality and freshness and inviting viewers to pause and admire its beauty. The elaborate and refined inlay process used to craft the round flower is evident in the flawless cutting and precise setting of each gemstone, which glows with radiant clarity, telling an enduring



story of eternal spring. Within Beijing's major museums, the elegant blues of cloisonné artistry, the vibrant vermilion of carved lacquerware and the radiant gold of filigree inlay shine brilliantly beneath the gallery

lights. These extraordinary crafts serve not only as vessels of the wisdom passed down by ancient artisans but also as preservers of spring's beauty and vitality, captured in timeless form. With each viewing, audiences are offered the chance to revisit treasured memories of spring landscapes that transcend the boundaries of time.



▲ A cloisonné duomu-styled vessel with floral motifs





Yuyuantan Park

## Revelling in a Carnival of Flowers

Currently, the presence of flowers extends far beyond their traditional roles as vibrant accents in gardens or decorative motifs on objects. They are subtly weaving themselves into the daily lives of Beijingers, appearing in fresh and creative ways. As spring gradually unfolds, cultural festivals centred around a variety of blossoms are emerging throughout the city's parks, becoming a growing trend warmly embraced by Beijing's residents. At the height of the blooming season, people stroll leisurely through expansive seas of flowers, captivated by the enchanting fragrances and vivid colours that define spring.

They are not only enjoying the graceful scenery, but also immersing themselves in the rich cultural atmosphere created by these flourishing displays.

After spending time amidst the picturesque garden landscapes, people often return home carrying a selection of cultural and creative products inspired by the spring blooms they have encountered. These might include a beautifully crafted floral ornament, a soft and graceful scarf adorned with delicate flower motifs, or a practical household item decorated with charming blossom patterns. Such pieces extend the joy of spring flowers from the garden to the home, bringing natural beauty into everyday surroundings and blending seamlessly into daily life.

Yuyuantan Park stands as North China's most renowned destination for enjoying the beauty of cherry blossoms. Based on their different blooming periods, cherry blossoms are classified into early-, mid- and late-blooming varieties. Beginning in March, the park's diverse cherry trees bloom in succession, creating a prolonged and captivating display. At the same time, the park hosted its 36th Cherry Blossom Cultural Event and 6th Joint Exhibition for Spring Flowers, both of which marked a significant upgrade from previous editions. Over 3,000 cherry trees burst into bloom, including varieties such as Somei Yoshino, Hangzhou Early-blooming Cherry and Kanzan. Visitors can explore a number of attractions



Posing with cherry blossoms at Yuyuantan Park



A creative ice-cream at Yuyuantan Park

designed specifically for cherry blossom viewing, including the park's iconic one-kilometre-long Cherry Causeway. Along this scenic path, vibrant blossoms flourish on both sides, intermingling with winter jasmine, weeping forsythia, lilacs and Chinese flowering crabapples—each vying for attention in a dazzling display of spring's splendour. As they stroll along the causeway, visitors can fully immerse themselves in a vivid tapestry of springtime sights.

In addition to exploring the park's natural beauty, visitors can enjoy a cherry blossom-shaped ice cream, adding a playful and celebratory charm to their springtime outing. The park's collection of "little cherry" themed cultural and creative products becomes especially

enticing during cherry blossom season, as each item is closely tied to the blooms. These products prominently feature soft pink tones and include a variety of appealing souvenirs, such as refrigerator magnets adorned with cheerful cherry blossom garlands, a delightful selection of cherry blossom keychains, and both practical and stylish items like cherry blossom-themed clipboards and loose-leaf notebooks. One standout piece is a meticulously crafted crystal ball with a radiant lustre, combining the iconic image of a carousel with delicate cherry blossoms to create a dreamy and captivating atmosphere.

Peach blossoms are among spring's most delicate heralds. By mid-March, they begin to unfurl their beauty across the capital. At the China National Botanical Garden (North Garden), the eagerly awaited third Peach Blossom Viewing Season and World Famous Flower Exhibition opened as scheduled, offering a visual feast as the blossoms gently emerged. Within the dedicated Peach Blossom Garden, countless varieties flourish. In early April, the renowned Pinhong ("Enjoying Red") and Pinxia ("Enjoying Sunglow") varieties—considered the garden's star attractions—were the first to bloom. The Pinxia variety, in particular, is striking, with its

vibrant pink hues interwoven with soft white shades, creating a breathtaking display that irresistibly captivates visitors and makes them pause to admire the colourful blossoms.

Within a quiet corner of the garden, the scenery at Peach Blossom Creek leaves a lasting impression. As visitors stroll along the 100-metre-long path, it seems as if they are entering a dreamlike realm devoted entirely to the beauty of peach blossoms. In spring, the enchanting allure of these blossoms extends well beyond the tree branches. During the lively Peach Blossom Festival and the accompanying cultural and creative market at the China National Botanical Garden, visitors discover that spring offers a wealth of joyful experiences. The third annual Planting Spring Colours cultural and creative activity blends botany with artistic innovation, presenting a range of imaginative ideas inspired by the season. The event is thoughtfully divided into several themed zones, one of which features playful and creative exhibits centred on plush toys. In this area, visitors can find delightful plush figures inspired by the Pinxia peach blossom, presenting the vibrant spring bloom in a charming new form.

Further enriching the interactive experience, the organisers of the





activity have thoughtfully designed plush flowerpots, water bottles and matching accessories. These allow buyers to assemble the pieces as if they were cultivating plush-themed toys, offering a playful way to enjoy the spirit of spring gardening. In addition, each plush toy comes with a science popularisation card, adding an educational element that enhances the fun of the activity while also promoting scientific knowledge among the public.

For visitors wishing to explore beyond plush toys, the lively cultural and creative market offers a wide array of interesting and highly practical products. A remarkable collection includes items such as refrigerator magnets, incense, fans and mobile phone lanyards, all of which skilfully blend the natural beauty of peach blossoms with the refined elegance of tulips. These items are not only visually appealing but also functional, making them perfect for indoor use. They allow visitors to enjoy the charm of spring while also taking home a unique and memorable keepsake of the season.

With the joyful arrival of spring, Zhongshan Park in Beijing transforms into a vibrant sea of colourful tulips. The annual Tulip Culture Festival is one of the most eagerly anticipated and widely attended spring flower events in the

capital, drawing crowds eager to admire the stunning tulip displays. This year marks the 30th edition of the Zhongshan Park Tulip Culture Festival, which not only features the public's favourite traditional varieties but also, for the first time, introduces a selection of rare and unique tulips. These additions bring even more captivating colours and intriguing stories to the already spectacular floral exhibition.

Upon entering Zhongshan Park, visitors are welcomed by a sweeping sea of multicoloured tulips. Among this stunning display, the Red Parrot variety stands out with its uniquely shaped petals resembling a parrot's crest. These soft yet vivid petals evoke the gentle flutter of bird feathers, creating a vivid sense of



▲ A creative ice-cream at the China National Botanical Garden

movement and vitality. Also catching the eye is the Disneyland Paris variety, with its vibrant orange petals elegantly shaped like wine glasses, radiating a distinctive beauty. Meanwhile, the edges of the San Clemente tulip's petals resemble delicately trimmed feathers, producing a subtly fluffy texture that further enhances its visual appeal.

For photography enthusiasts, the sea of tulips in Zhongshan Park offers countless opportunities to capture stunning images. Whether visitors pose among the colourful blooms or seize the fleeting moment when sunlight filters through the petals, each photograph becomes a vivid woven tapestry, gracefully preserving the beauty and vitality that define the spring season.

In 2025, the Tulip Culture Festival in Zhongshan Park features a special exhibition thoughtfully titled "Three Decades of the Fragrance of Tulips Filling Zhongshan." This event offers a retrospective on the evolution and development of the tulip exhibitions held in the park over the past 30 years, presented through historical photographs, treasured artefacts and a diverse array of floral varieties. These valuable displays not only highlight the fascinating cultural journey of tulips from the Netherlands to Beijing, but also bear witness to the profound and lasting bond between the park and this cherished flower. For history enthusiasts, the exhibition is a visual treat—rich in knowledge and entertainment—inviting visitors on an immersive journey through time and space marked by the vibrant bloom of tulips.

After visiting the sea of tulips, visitors can step into the park's century-old Laijinyuxuan Restaurant, which also offers an enchanting tea-drinking experience. By ordering a pot of fragrant tea, they can relax and enjoy the venue's tranquil atmosphere. A celebrated gathering place for cultural elites during the Republic of China period (1911–1949), Laijinyuxuan was frequented by many notable figures, including the esteemed Lu Xun (1881–

1936). Today, the restaurant has become a popular destination on social media, attracting visitors with its retro-inspired, elegant décor and the soothing aroma of tea that fills the air. It offers a rare blend of historical charm and contemporary appeal. A pot of fragrant jasmine tea, paired with the restaurant's signature steamed buns filled with savoury salted-vegetable stuffing, provide guests with a truly memorable and flavourful experience.

The graceful and opulent presence of the peony—affectionately known as the "King of Flowers" in traditional Chinese culture—is an unmissable highlight of springtime in Beijing. Each year, the highly anticipated Peony Culture Festival held in Jingshan Park attracts large numbers of visitors eager to admire its splendid blooms. This year marks a significant milestone: the 20th edition of Jingshan Park's Peony Culture Festival. Once again, its breathtaking sea of peonies, a vivid display of natural beauty, ushers in its own spectacular celebration.

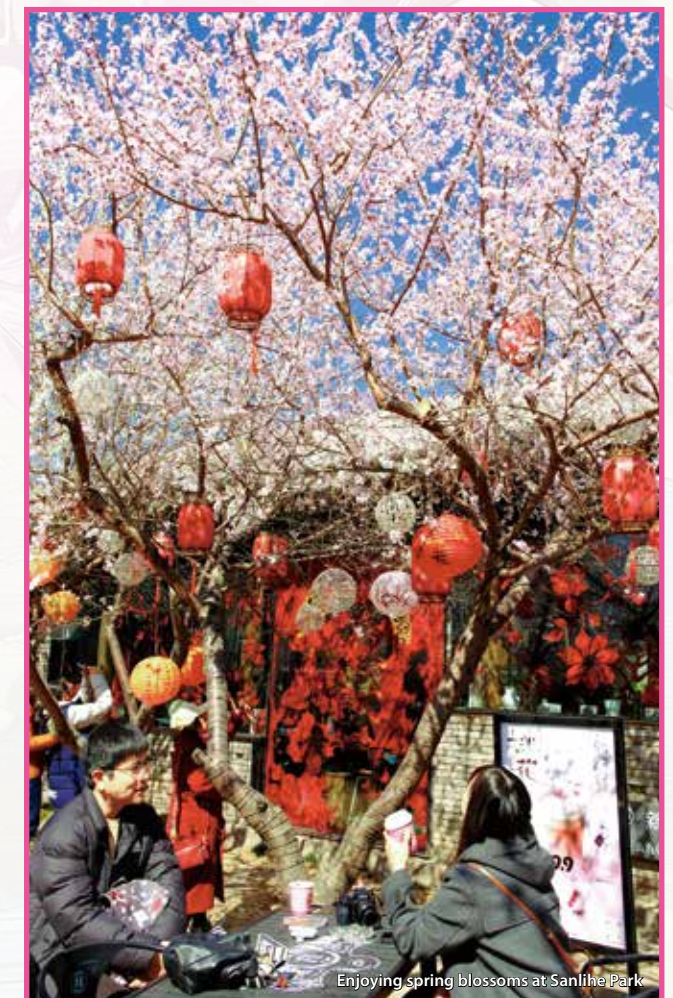
Upon entering the park and strolling leisurely through the dedicated peony planting area, visitors are greeted by the harmonious and artful fusion of the peony—affectionately known as the "Luochuan Goddess"—set against the backdrop of the park's ancient vermilion wall. Whether in deep red, pink-white, or radiant golden tones, the peonies exude a charm that is both delicate and resplendent, each bloom showcasing its breathtaking beauty and captivating fragrance in full glory.

As night falls, the peonies in Jingshan Park reveal a unique charm distinct from their daytime splendour. Night-time viewing has become one of the most popular springtime activities. As darkness descends, strategically placed lights throughout the precious peony garden illuminate the stunning blooms, casting a magical glow over their delicate petals. In addition, advanced projection lights have been installed on the ancient vermilion wall, displaying elegant poetic verses that celebrate the beauty of the peonies, enriching the visual experience. While admiring the illuminated blossoms under the night sky, visitors are also invited to appreciate the depth of traditional Chinese culture and the artistic beauty conveyed through the accompanying poetry. Each scene is steeped in cultural significance, offering visitors an experience that is as intoxicating as it is unforgettable.

For visitors seeking a change of scenery beyond the city's historic gardens, the charming pocket parks tucked within Beijing's streets and alleyways offer a refreshing alternative. Just behind the bustling Qianmen commercial district, Sanlihe Park evokes the idyllic image of a peach blossom spring, much like that described by the renowned poet Tao Yuanming (AD 365–427). As visitors stroll along the bluestone path, a small river winds gently like a silken ribbon, flanked by rows of blossoming peach trees. Pink-white petals drift into the flowing water, startling the leisurely black swans and prompting them to flap their wings, sending ripples across the surface. The park's beauty resides in its delicate balance between design and nature, with approximately 30 percent of the layout meticulously planned and the remaining 70 percent composed of untouched natural landscape. Near

the old wooden trestle, branches heavy with vibrant blooms extend gracefully over blue-brick, grey-tiled courtyard walls, forming a scenic frame visible through the French windows of the welcoming VOYAGE COFFEE. For those in need of a rest, the café at the entrance of a quiet alley offers a tranquil spot to stop. Visitors can enjoy a fragrant latte topped with a peach blossom design, paired with a soft cheese mousse bearing a matching motif. Here, they can take in the blooming trees and flowing water, all while savouring the gentle spring breeze. Truly, few places in Beijing capture the essence of spring quite as well as this.

In spring, Beijing, renowned as a garden city, presents a series of picturesque scenes as flowers bloom across the urban landscape. From ancient floral traditions to contemporary flower-themed events, the spirit of spring has been lovingly passed down through generations. These experiences not only enrich the spiritual lives of Beijing's residents but also highlight the city's profound cultural heritage and its uniquely captivating urban charm. In this vibrant and flourishing season, let us rediscover the city's parks, museums and seas of blossoms, taking time to enjoy the warmth and beauty of spring and to savour the enduring charm of this ancient capital.



Enjoying spring blossoms at Sanlihe Park





# Tales of Yulan Magnolia Blossoms in Dajue Temple

Translated by Chen Si Photos by Cao Bing, Tong Tianyi, Zhang Xin

The beauty of a flower can only be fully captured when its connotation is explored thoroughly. Every spring, as I frame blooms through my lens, I am often reminded of a dear friend's insight into photographic aesthetics beneath the ancient Yulan magnolia tree at Dajue Temple in Beijing. She said, "A close-up shot of flowers looks gorgeous indeed, yet without any background information provided, how do the flowers differ from those in parks or community gardens?" Her words were like a flash of enlightenment, and all of a sudden, I realised the allure of magnolia blossoms in the temple.

The magnolia tree has stood in the temple for three hundred years. Its blossoms are not only a display of spring splendour but they are also a testament

to time. It embodies centuries of resilience under the trials of nature, and the genuine affection of countless visitors from ancient times to the present. It has long been chanted in the continuous stream of poems and lyrics that capture its most beautiful moments. Why did it grow here? Where did it originate? How could it earn the title of the King of Magnolia in Beijing? These questions lured me to embark on the journey of discovery this spring.

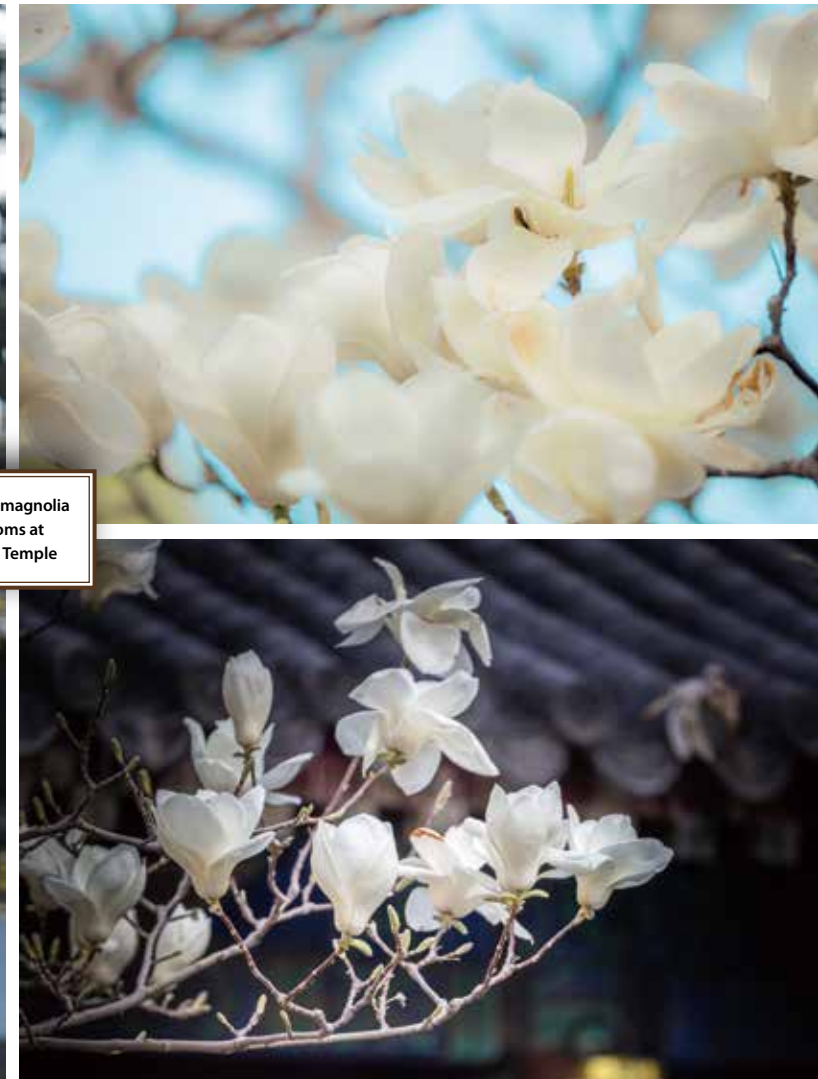
Grown in the courtyard of the Dajue Temple's Siyi Hall, the 300-year-old magnolia is known to be the oldest of its kind in the capital city. In spring day, a multitude of silvery white magnolia blossoms come into full bloom, adding an unparalleled charm to the city. Legend has it that the magnolia was planted by the eminent Master Jialing

(1671–1726), the temple's first abbot, during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). Another widely known tale says it was transplanted alongside his remains from southern China. I was convinced that the tree must be traced back to Hangzhou City when I worked on the writing of "Chronicles of the Magnolia at Dajue Temple" last year.

Several years ago, for my research on the culture and history of Dajue Temple, I visited some temples where the Zen Master Jialing had once stayed, including Hangzhou's Li'an Temple and Jiangxi's Guizong Temple. It was in Li'an Temple that Master Jialing attained enlightenment in Buddhism and inherited the Dharma lineage. Then he served as the abbot there for three years. Guizong Temple was his final resting place. When I saw the magnolia



Yulan magnolia blossoms at Dajue Temple



blossoms in the creeks and gullies near Li'an Temple, I seemed to uncover the origin of the magnolias in Dajue Temple. Yet, these thoughts remained uncertain due to my youthful naivety and superficial understanding back then. My doubts began to vanish when I was working on my writing last year. Li'an Temple in Hangzhou was a significant place where Master Jialing's enlightenment and the transmission of the Linji School of Buddhism took root. Later, summoned to Beijing's Dajue Temple, he carried this legacy forward, planting the seeds of Linji teachings in the imperial capital. The magnolia, in this context, became a metaphor: a silent witness to the unbroken chain of wisdom between the two temples, and the fulfilment of the most sacred mission of a Buddhist.

If Dajue Temple's 300-year-old magnolia tree finds its origin in Hangzhou, perhaps there are even older of its kind awaiting discovery in this city? I became fascinated by the images of the 500-year-old magnolia at Hangzhou's Faxi Temple. On a recent spring day, I visited the temple and saw the old tree in full bloom. The connection between Hangzhou and Dajue Temple's magnolia seemed undeniable.

Known as a monk of great historic significance and influence, Master Jialing had a close connection with Emperor Yongzheng (reign: 1722–1735) of the Qing Dynasty, who conferred on him the title of National Preceptor after his parinirvana. His journey to prominence began in 1713, during the 52nd year of Emperor Kangxi's reign (1661–1722). At that time, Prince

Yong, the future Emperor Yongzheng, appointed Master Jialing as the abbot of the newly renovated Bailin Temple, just to the east of his residence (now known as the Yonghegong Lama Temple). The renovation was to celebrate the 60th birthday of Emperor Kangxi. During Jialing's tenure at Bailin Temple, news came from Hangzhou's Li'an Temple of the passing of Zen Master Yuejian, who had succumbed to starvation while begging during a famine. Touched by the tragedy, Prince Yong recalled Master Jialing's poignant reflections on it and the historical significance of Li'an Temple. Therefore, the prince commenced a comprehensive three-year restoration endeavor. In 1716, Master Jialing was dispatched to Li'an Temple as its abbot. For three years onwards, he developed a deeper





affection for the scenery of the Jiangnan region. Afterwards, he was invited to stay in Guizong Temple in Jiangxi Province for over a year. Subsequently, he was summoned back to Beijing by Prince Yong and became the abbot of Dajue Temple. To honour this appointment, in 1720, the prince wrote an inscription on a stele for Master Jialing to Dajue Temple to show his favour and appreciation.

His return to the capital city must have given him so much confidence that he once ambitiously envisioned renaming Mount Yangtai to “Dajue Mountain” and Dajue Temple to “Buddha Spring Temple.” These historical records show that he desired to expand his influence and engage in great undertakings. Yet, fate played tricks on him. Upon Prince Yong’s ascension to the throne, imperial caution tempered his once-close ties with former friends among monks and Taoists, including Master Jialing, to avoid criticism. Faced with such a case, Master Jialing showed extraordinary enlightenment. Rather than dwelling on the

failure of propagating Buddhist teachings, he chose to depart Beijing and wandered the mountains and rivers in humble solitude as historical records revealed. It was not until the autumn of 1726 that he made his way back to Guizong Temple due to the suffering of illness. Among his final wishes was a plea to be interred at Dajue Temple. The emperor granted this request and even ordered that an inscribed reliquary pagoda be built at Guizong Temple in his honour. The inscription praised Master Jialing highly for his divine virtues, stating that he possessed a mind as clear as a mirror and insights loftier than the far-reaching lamp of compassion. Interestingly, later in his reign, Emperor Yongzheng’s attitude toward Master Jialing underwent a dramatic shift. What was once praise turned into criticism. Yet, this does not affect later generations’ understanding of the relationship between the emperor and the master, nor their true characters. The bond of the two figures, upon my deeper reflection, has transcended worldly appearances. As the *Diamond Sutra*

teaches, “Everything with form is unreal.” Their spiritual resonance made them fulfil one another. If spreading the Dharma could serve the emperor’s mission to enlighten the masses, Master Jialing would carve temples into the mountains; if retreat was necessary for consolidating imperial power, he would go into seclusion. The fame and fortune that followed his passing, should they serve the greater good, are but tools in the emperor’s hands. He will do whatever benefits the emperor in life, not to mention any dedications after death. Though the world failed to comprehend them, they did not care. For those who stood at the pinnacle of power, true companionship was rare and precious. Their actions and words were guided by a shared purpose: to benefit all beings. Together, they reached the realm of selflessness.

Siyi Hall, named after Emperor Yongzheng’s study room, stands as a testament to the friendship between the emperor and Master Jialing, where magnolia blossoms and imperial plaques intertwine

in harmony. In 1747, Emperor Qianlong (reign: 1735–1796) ordered a restoration of the temple, moved by his father’s profound connection with Master Jialing. Beneath the original stele, he inscribed a new hymn in memory of their close link, the best acknowledgment of the former emperor’s shifting attitude towards Master Jialing. After Master Jialing’s passing, Emperor Yongzheng visited the temple once more and wrote a poem to praise the monk’s sacred majesty that transcends form. Emperor Qianlong also inscribed a poem on Siyi Hall to reflect on the belief that all is but illusion in the cycle of life. Their verses best encapsulate the essence of “dwelling beyond form” in the Zen philosophy.

Year after year, as the blossoms bloom anew, the ancient temple keeps inviting the masses to appreciate its vitality throughout the ages.

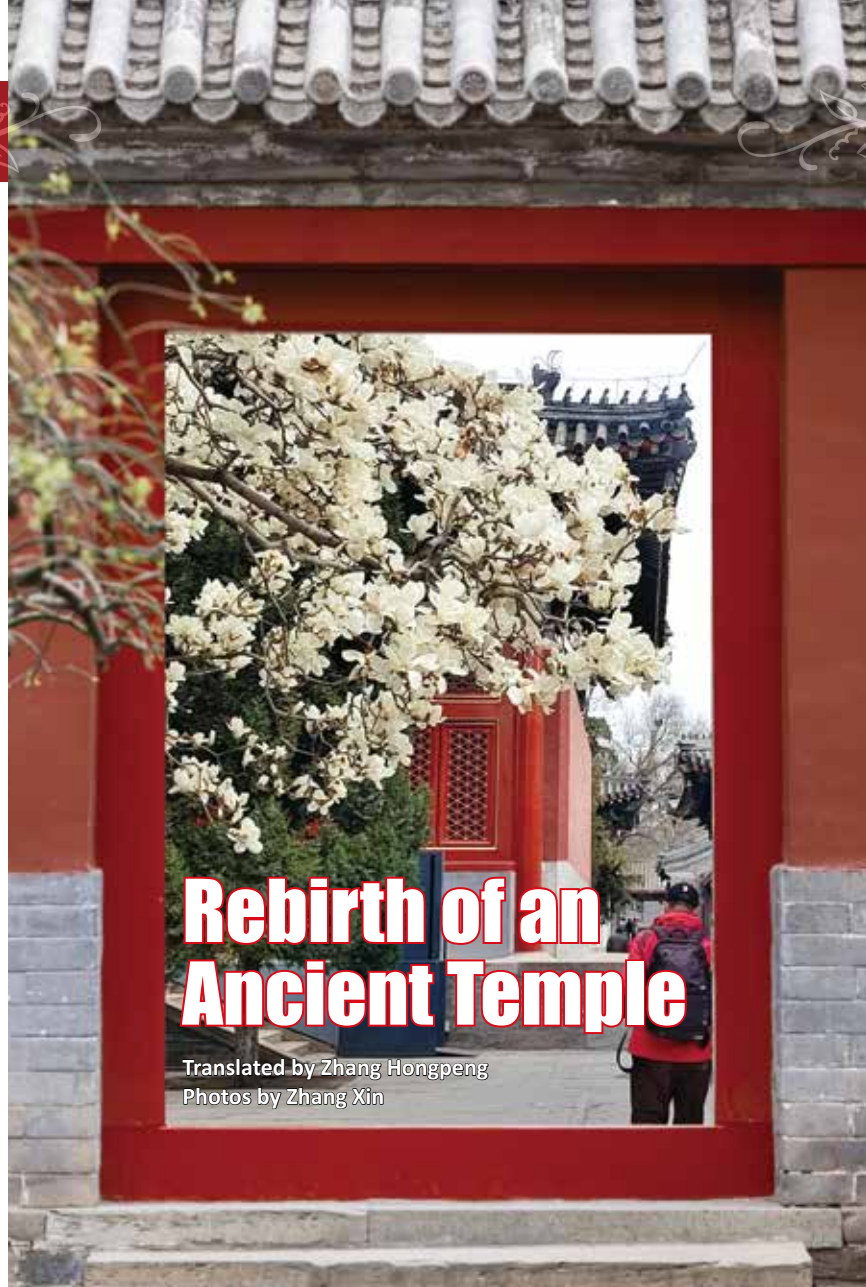
The ancient magnolia of Dajue Temple seems to be whispering tales of bygone eras, and a wonderful encounter awaits you.



▲ A hall’s caisson ceiling at Dajue Temple  
▼ Yulan magnolia blossoms set off the roof of an ancient building at Dajue Temple







## Rebirth of an Ancient Temple

Translated by Zhang Hongpeng  
Photos by Zhang Xin

Within the bustling West Third Ring Road lies a quiet small courtyard.

This was once a picturesque western suburb, where willow breezes and rippling wheat fields offered solace to the soul; once the revered Buddhist temple by the river, thriving in imperial times and hosting imperial birthday celebrations.

This is Wanshou Temple, an ancient architectural complex that combines elements of a temple, garden and imperial residence. The buildings are arranged in a layout with distinct western, central and eastern sections.

Wanshou Temple, now open to the public as the Beijing Art Museum, has weathered the passage of time, rising and falling with history. To work here feels like a rare stroke of fortune. My

workplace is often embraced by lush greenery—perhaps a twist of fate, or something more—a destined encounter. Though it may not carry the deep resonance that novelist Shi Tiesheng (1951–2010) felt for the Temple of Earth, it holds its own quiet poignancy.

The people who come and go in a hurry are mere specks of dust in the long lives of the ancient trees. What I see as deep sorrow or lingering pain is, to them, nothing more than a passing breeze—gone without a trace, for their lives are far too long, and not fully extended.

Stepping into Wanshou Temple, visitors move through the currents of history, traced in its halls, steles and ancient trees.

In the first courtyard stand two

ancient trees: to the east, an immortal pagoda tree symbolising “an enduring homeland, generations flourishing,” and to the west, a thousand-year-old catalpa tree representing “eternal prosperity, unyielding through the ages.”

These four hundred years have borne witness to countless cycles—flowers fading and blooming anew beneath ever-changing skies.

As I pause in this secluded courtyard, along the quiet, winding path, watching the drifting fallen leaves, I can’t help but wonder—who once walked these grounds centuries ago? Who sat in meditation here? Did they, too, feel the same joy, or wrestle with the same uncertainties as I do?

The moon that once shone on the ancients is no longer visible to the present-day people, yet the same moon now shining once beheld their light. Gazing upon these traces of history, I wonder—if time could turn back a hundred years, what moments might have unfolded here? Perhaps only the weathered architecture in these quiet courtyards and the shifting shadows of ancient trees hold the answers.

“Golden foil reflects on painted beams, sunset illuminates on ancient pines./ To seek a place of serene solitude, trace within the tower is found.”

Historical records reveal that in 1577, the fifth year of the Wanli era (1573–1620) of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), Wanshou Temple was founded at the behest of Empress Dowager Li (1545–1614). The temple reflected her heartfelt wish for lasting peace and stability during her young son’s reign. She prayed for a world in harmony—mother and son united, emperor and ministers in harmony. Senior Grand Secretary Zhang Juzheng (1525–1582) composed the temple’s stele inscription, filled with ornate language and an air of bright celebration.

Waiting for a flower to bloom at Wanshou Temple feels like awaiting the quiet unfolding of destiny. It blossoms gently yet with boldness—silent, yet full of unspoken pride. One day it might still be a small bud, alone on its branch. Then, after



one absentminded stroll, you turn around to find that the spring breeze has suddenly brought 1,000 trees into glorious bloom.

The flowers bloom with a striking individuality, much like the temple itself. As soon as the wintersweet fades away with quiet elegance, Yulan magnolias burst forth in swift succession. Then, without pause, spring fully arrives.

Bathed in sunlight and gazing at the cascade of Yulan magnolia blossoms, viewers are instantly struck by their vitality, a smile rising effortlessly. In that moment, all gloom and sorrow are lifted by the exuberant spring scene, leaving behind only a lingering trace of quiet joy.

In March, wintersweet blossoms with a chilly solitude; in April, Yulan magnolias cascade like waterfalls. Soon after, catalpa trees enter full bloom, covering the sky in a soft purple haze. Along the eastern path, tulips race to unfurl, ushering in a vibrant sea of colour.

These flowers are beautiful but never showy; they bloom with brilliance yet never domineer.

They draw countless visitors to this 448-year-old temple to embrace the



arrival of spring. Here, amid the blossoms, people catch a glimpse of the warmth and richness that defines the city’s cultural spaces.

They bloom in the breeze, carrying the hope of spring—quietly telling stories of life, renewal and the gentle passing of time.

Casting a beam of spring light at dusk, the flowers carry a gentle breeze that gently sketches the contours of the temple and the quiet alleyway.

Spring returns, flowers endure and the starry sky remains unchanged.

The mottled traces left by time are memories carved by the ages.

Our mission, as generations of museum workers, is to recount the stories shaped by time to those who follow.

Every structure, every stele and every lintel plaque here carries a story, each preserving a fragment of the past. Some reflect an emperor’s ideals, resolve or emotions. Perhaps, at heart, he was just a son, using architecture to convey his longing for his mother.

As visitors walk further into the courtyard, a ginkgo tree can be seen standing on each side of the artificial hill’s

northern slope. I’ve passed these trees countless times. Yet in the stillness of the deep night, standing before them, I often feel the urge to speak—but no words ever come.

A solitary lamp fades away along the endless road. Returning to where I began, I find I am still alone.

Beneath the ginkgo tree, we vowed to protect each other—yet in the end, dust returns to dust, and ashes to ashes.

Sighing over the impermanence of worldly affairs and shifting hearts, I furrow my brows in sorrow as night gives way to dawn.

Why do we linger on the past when it cannot be restored? The dawn wind rolls up the curtain—yet the fragrance remains, just as it always has.

History records the past, while museums offer a glimpse into the future. As I earnestly explore the relics of bygone eras, my doubts and confusions will gradually dissipate. A new day will always dawn.

“With delicate tea refreshing me in the stale air, alone in the quiet courtyard I stand. / I pour out my feelings with a writing brush, solving my uncertain doubts.”



# A Vista of Refined Beauty

Translated by Zhang Hongpeng Photos by He Rong, Jia Jianxin

Once again, spring's blossoms grace the season, and colleagues in the cultural heritage sector have collectively turned their cameras to "flower-appreciation mode." Across Beijing's museums, flowers enliven and enrich the spring, with nature and visitors enhancing one another. As social media's influence continues to grow, "instagrammable spots" have brought added attention to museum visits. Yet, compared with the sweeping, cloud-like cascades of blooms found elsewhere, the plants at the Mei Lanfang Memorial Museum remain relatively unknown—even plain. Through the changing seasons, flowers and trees bloom in turn—some lush and vibrant, others sparse and understated—arranged with a quiet, natural grace. It feels as though the renowned Peking Opera artist Mei Lanfang (1894–1961) still resides within these courtyards, infusing every corner with a quiet yet vibrant pulse of life.

Following the liberation of China, Mei returned to Beijing to work. In 1950, he settled at Jia 1 (present-day No. 9) Huguosi Jie, Xicheng District, where he and his family spent the final decade of his life. On April 3, 1951, the Academy of Traditional Chinese Opera (the predecessor of the Chinese National Academy of Arts) was founded, with Mei Lanfang appointed as its president. Chairman Mao Zedong (1893–1976) personally wrote the inscription "*bai hua qi fang, tui chen chu xin*" (meaning "various flowers bloom together, and new works are released to replace the old ones") to express his hopes for the academy's development. According to Mei Lanfang's son, Mei Baochen (1925–2008), one day Mei Lanfang asked his assistant Liu Dejun to purchase two crabapple trees from the Huguosi Flower Shop and plant them in the courtyard. This gesture not only marked the founding of the academy and conveyed a blessing for the flourishing future of traditional Chinese opera, but also served as a form of self-



A bust of Mei Lanfang

encouragement—to cultivate talent for the nation and look forward to a garden in full bloom and fruit in abundance.

The two crabapple trees stand with graceful foliage each year around the Qingming Festival. Under their branches lies a carved white marble fish basin, where goldfish dart playfully through the water, creating a refined tableau of "abundance and prosperity" alongside the spring blooms. Every spring, the Mei Lanfang Memorial Museum hosts its signature "Encountering Mei Lanfang" Crabapple Season Gathering. Amid drifting petals, visitors are treated to renditions of the Mei School classic, *The Heavenly Maiden Scattering Blossoms*. As the east wind stirs the branches, blossoms fall like snow, dissolving the boundary between art and reality. At the same time, two white lilacs bloom in front of Mei Lanfang's former study and bedroom. Tucked quietly along the red-and-green corridor north of the main residence, their faint scent carries into the front courtyard with every passing breeze—answering the poetic yearning once expressed by Chinese-born American writer Eileen Chang (1920–1995), who noted with

regret that "crabapple blossoms lack scent."

During the transition from spring to summer, in front of the museum's north-facing room (Thematic Exhibition Hall), the northern catalpa comes into bloom, casting its shadow across the surrounding eaves. The small yellowish blossoms are sparsely scattered among the foliage. The old Chinese toon tree nearby may not be as lush as the catalpa, but it possesses a quiet charm of its own. Whether radiant or restrained, faintly fragrant or richly aromatic, each plant complements the next, collectively celebrating the vitality of spring. When offering guided tours to schoolchildren, we often liken the plants in the garden to human virtues: each blooms in its own time, governed by nature's rhythm, yet all equally embody the beauty of spring.

As summer arrives, the museum is cloaked in dense shade, seemingly without blossoms to admire. Yet beyond the visible flowers, Mei Lanfang's former residence nurtures some "invisible" blooms that are unique to the season. In the inner courtyard, four cloud-patterned pillar capitals stand before the fish basin—once



Crabapple blossoms at the Mei Lanfang Memorial Museum

used by Mei Lanfang himself to support pots of morning glories. Mei had a deep and refined appreciation for these flowers, often exchanging prized varieties with friends for mutual enjoyment and study. He even organised small competitions to celebrate their delicate beauty.

Morning glories, also known as "morning faces," bloom at dawn and wither by dusk. To witness their unfolding, Mei Lanfang had to rise early each day. This hobby not only supported his morning vocal exercises and intake of fresh air, strengthening his lungs, but also enriched his appreciation of China's chromatic artistry. By studying the flowers' soft gradients and naturally curling petals, he refined the visual language of his Mei School stagecraft. As Mei recalled, the signature gestures of Imperial Consort Yang admiring, smelling and plucking blossoms in the Peking Opera piece *The Drunken Concubine* were born from this very passion. In the museum's west wing (Thematic Exhibition Hall II), Qi Baishi's (1864–1957) painting "Morning Glories" is displayed—a vibrant tribute to those floral gatherings at Mei's residence.

On the west side of the original exhibition room in the northern building of the museum lies Mei Lanfang's study.

Displayed on its walls is *Four Panels of Lotus Flowers*, a set of paintings gifted to Mei by Qi Baishi. Further beyond the moon gate, in the western courtyard's Thematic Exhibition Hall III, a more extensive display explores Mei Lanfang's deep engagement with the art of painting. Mei devoted himself to the study of calligraphy and painting, learning from masters such as Wang Mengbai (1888–1934), Yao Mangfu (1876–1930), Wang Aishi (1871–1960) and Qi Baishi. His brushwork—especially in floral-and-bird motifs and Buddhist figures—radiates a distinct spiritual vitality. These paintings serve not only as testaments to his literary and artistic accomplishments but also as emblems of his unwavering integrity during the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression. When Mei grew a moustache in protest of the Japanese occupation, his art became both a personal refuge and a means of subsistence, embodying his determination to "sell art for survival" while remaining morally resolute.

In autumn and winter, most plants in the museum stand bare, but the two persimmon trees in front of the northern house remain adorned with red fruit, like glowing lanterns. Grafted onto apple trees,

these persimmon trees not only symbolise the auspicious phrase "*shi shi ping an*" (meaning "all things peaceful"), but also yield fruit that is notably crisp, sweet and juicy. The trees often attract flocks of birds, whose cheerful calls seem to offer gratitude to Mei himself. When the persimmons are dusted with frost or begin to fall, it signals that a new year is near.

Though the master has gone, Mei's garden remains vibrant. More than six decades have passed since Mei Lanfang's death, yet visitors to the museum's courtyard often feel as though his presence still lingers. This feeling, born of deep reverence for the legendary maestro, evokes a powerful sense of timeless communion with history. To offer visitors the experience of sharing "the same moon that once shone upon ancients" is one of the most meaningful rewards of preserving cultural heritage. In 2024, to mark the 130th anniversary of Mei Lanfang's birth, his former residence underwent structural restoration and exhibition upgrades with support from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the National Cultural Heritage Administration. Today, the museum welcomes visitors with a renewed grace, inviting them to reflect on and celebrate the maestro's enduring legacy.





## 舞台剧《寄生虫》

2025年5月8日-11日国家大剧院-戏剧场上演根据荣获第92届奥斯卡金像奖四项大奖的同名电影改编的话剧《寄生虫》。该剧自2022年首演以来，已在全国巡演67场，本轮演出由吴樾领衔主演。12位主要演员、3个家庭，现实与荒诞、喜剧与悲剧，暗流汹涌的大戏成就了别样的黑色故事。该剧导演杨婷的作品一向具有荒诞、幽默、悬疑、哲思以及亦庄亦谐的独特气质，她的舞台处理凸显了剧场与众不同的魅力，并为该剧赋予了一种强烈的诗意和荒诞感。

## The Stage Drama *Parasite*

From May 8 to 11, 2025, the Theatre of the National Centre for the Performing Arts will stage the drama *Parasite*, adapted from the Oscar-winning film that swept four categories at the 92nd Academy Awards. Since its debut in 2022, the production has toured nationally with 67 performances. This run features Wu Yue in the lead role. With 12 principal cast members and three interwoven families, the play blends reality and absurdity, comedy and tragedy, creating a gripping undercurrent that builds to a uniquely dark narrative. Director Yang Ting—renowned for her distinctive fusion of absurdity, humour, suspense and philosophical depth, all delivered in a tone balancing gravity and wit—infuses the production with a rich theatrical sensibility. Her staging brings out the poetic intensity and surreal qualities of the story, offering audiences a powerful and thought-provoking theatrical experience.



## 璀璨与史诗： 阿尔丰斯·穆夏的艺术诗篇

艺术展于2025年4月3日-7月6日在今日美术馆-1号馆开展。本次展览呈现近200幅穆夏真迹作品，从巴黎的商业艺术创作到布拉格的严肃作品，包含绘画、海报、画册、书籍插画、平面设计等，全方位展现穆夏的艺术创作历程，让观众近距离欣赏大师的精湛技艺，感受其作品的深刻内涵。以巨幅光影画卷呈现穆夏的鸿篇巨制《斯拉夫史诗》系列，带领观众回望斯拉夫波澜壮阔的神话与历史，沉浸式感受其所承载的民族历史文化基因，深入理解穆夏艺术精神的所在。设置穆夏AI数字人互动体验，通过实时问答对话，让每一位观众成为穆夏艺术的主动探索者，深入了解穆夏的生平、艺术作品、创作理念及其背后的故事。

## Alphonse Mucha: Brilliant and Epic

The exhibition "Alphonse Mucha: Brilliant and Epic" will be held in Hall 1 of the Today Art Museum from April 3 to July 6, 2025. Showcasing nearly 200 original works by Mucha, it traces his artistic journey from commercial art in Paris to his more solemn creations in Prague, including paintings, posters, illustrated books, book illustrations and graphic designs. The exhibition offers a rich and immersive view of Mucha's legacy, allowing audiences to appreciate both his exquisite craftsmanship and the profound depth of his work. A striking light-and-shadow installation brings Mucha's monumental *Slav Epic* series to life, immersing audiences in the rich mythology and history of the Slavic people.