



## A Comparative Study on the Cultural Connotations of English and Chinese Plant Words

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**Abstract:** It is widely acknowledged that language serves as a carrier of culture. Rooted in unique cultural backgrounds and conveying specific cultural connotations, words worldwide represent the most fundamental and flexible elements of languages. The relationship between humanity and nature is interdependent, and plant culture is closely intertwined with connected to human life. Indeed, the appreciation of plants and the cultivation of aesthetic sensibilities have become meaningful pursuits for many individuals. This is attributable to two key aspects: First, owing to their significantly practical value, bamboos in nature are used to craft tableware, and flower petals serve as important ingredients in certain foods. Plants also play an essential role in air purification, thus rendering them indispensable to human life. Second, people often project their emotions and aspirations onto plants because of the latter's distinctive shapes and growth habits. However, due to differences in cognitive patterns, religious beliefs, natural environments, and aesthetic values, plant-related vocabulary in English and Chinese embodies different cultural meanings. With the escalating global interaction, understanding the cultural connotations of plants is crucial to avoiding misunderstandings and facilitating effective cross-cultural communication. Cultural blending itself can transcend linguistic barriers and promote the construction of a global village. This essay explores the connotations, similarities and differences, social determinants, and significance of plant words to illuminate their distinct cultural interpretations.

**Key words:** language; culture; plant; cross-cultural communication

### 1. Introduction

Languages are inherently intertwined with culture, rendering it impossible to analyze the former in isolation from the latter. Plants not only possess substantial practical utility in daily life but also serve as vessels for human emotions. In daily life, plants hold significant practical value and serve as carriers of human emotion. Influenced by historical events, and shaped by historical contexts, traditions, customs, and natural environments, plant culture reflects a nation's spirit, lifestyle, and aesthetic standards. However, a comprehensive understanding of plant culture remains challenging. Owing to cultural differences, numerous scholars have embarked on exploring the cultural connotations of plant-related vocabulary in English and Chinese. Translators must meticulously address the unique characteristics of plant terms to ensure accurate semantic conveyance to readers.

In China, *The Book of Songs* and *The Songs of the South* have marked the beginning of the integrating of plant culture into poetry. Ancient Chinese literati frequently expressed their admiration for plants through verse, with the practice of using flowers to convey emotions evolving into a pervasive cultural phenomenon. In contrast, Western culture has been profoundly influenced by Greek-Roman myths and legends.

This paper primarily investigates the cultural connotative differences between English and Chinese plant terms and analyzes the underlying causes of these differences. Its objective is to benefit practitioners in language teaching, translation, and cross-cultural communication. The discussion is supported by numerous citations from literary works and dictionaries. A contrastive study of the cultural connotations of English and Chinese plant terms not only promotes the dissemination of Chinese civilization but also enhances global understanding of China. Furthermore, it encourages the absorption of foreign cultural elements to foster the development of China's spiritual civilization.

### 2. Literature Review

To deepen the understanding of cultural connotations in plant-related vocabulary, it is essential to first establish a theoretical foundation. In the former Soviet Union, the linguistics book *A Study of Linguistic National Conditions* gained prominence in the 1970s. Over time, academic focus in this field shifted from foreign language teaching to the exploration of national cultural meanings. In China, renowned linguist Professor Wang Dechun replaced the term *A Study of Linguistic National Conditions* with *Folk Semantics* to more effectively interpret cultural connotations. Another pivotal contribution came from Professor Xu Guozhang, who published the influential article titled *Culturally Loaded Words and English Language Teaching* in 1980. This work explored the relationship between culture-loaded words and English language instruction drawing significant academic attention. Xu's research prompted a paradigm shift in scholarship, redirecting focus from lexical forms to the cultural meanings embedded in words.



Given that plants have been inseparable from human life throughout history, a comprehensive analysis of cultural connotations in English and Chinese plant vocabulary is both academically necessary and practically valuable.

### 2.1 Language and Culture

Languages are familiar to us, as we engage with it daily. As a systemic framework of sounds and words that comprise characters, symbols, and intonation, language is a fundamental communicative tool. Every nation has its own language. Every nation possesses its unique linguistic system, with no language inherently superior to another. Each language embodies distinct features, reflecting specific lifestyles, thought patterns, and societal norms. As a historical record, languages enable descendants to explore past eras and gain insights through textual analysis indispensably.

What, then, constitutes the precise definition of language? As stated: “Language is a set of symbols used and understood by a large community of people, plus the rules for combining these symbols.” This definition categorizes language into verbal and nonverbal forms. Another perspective posits: “Language is purely historical heritage of the group, the product of long-continued social usage...Language is a fully formed functional system within man’s psychic or spiritual constitution,” highlighting its link to human mentality and culture. A further definition asserts: “The discussion may be summarized by referring to language as human vocal noise (or the graphic representation of this noise in writing used systematically and conventionally by a community for purposes of communication,” emphasizing its communicative core. Halliday argues that language is the primary medium through which individuals acquire social norms, enabling integration into groups (e.g., family, community) and adoption of cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors—a perspective underscoring language’s connection to social identity.

Derived from the Latin word “cultus”, the term “culture” originally denoted cultivation. In contemporary usage, culture means not only agricultural practices and production but also customs, beliefs, music, literature, cuisine, and more.

Sapir [5] defined culture as “what a society does and thinks,” while Hudson [1] considered it as “socially acquired knowledge.” Bates and Plog stated that “Culture is a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behavior and artifacts that society members use to navigate their world and interact with others, transmitted from generation to generation through learning.” According to this definition, culture includes behavioral patterns, cognitive frameworks, and culturally inherited skills for creating artifacts. They further defined culture as “the deposit of knowledge, experiences, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, timing, roles, spatial relationships, concepts of the universe, material objects, and possessions acquired by a large group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.”

Undoubtedly, language cannot exist in the absence of culture, and vice versa. Language is an external presentation of culture, with the two being inextricably intertwined.

### 2.2 Cultural Connotation

Shaped by societal contexts, numerous words bear not only literal meanings but also cultural connotations. But what precisely constitutes a word’s cultural meaning? According to Leech [2], “Connotative meaning is the communicative value an expression has by virtue of what it refers to, over and above its purely conceptual content.” This can be illustrated with the example of the red bean, which shares the same denotative meaning in both English and Chinese, referring to a type of food. However, its cultural connotations differ significantly.

In Chinese culture, the red bean symbolizes longing and love. For example, the classical poem “红豆生南国，春来发几枝。愿君多采撷，此物最相思” (Red beans grow in the southern land; in spring, they sprout a few branches. May you gather more of them, for they embody deep longing) uses red beans as a metaphor for affection and affection.

By contrast, in Anglophone cultures, red beans carry negative connotations rooted in biblical references. According to the Bible, Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of red bean stew, giving rise to the phrase “to sell one’s birthright for a bowl of red bean stew”, a metaphor for betraying principles for trivial gain. Therefore, when translating “红豆,” rendering it as “love bean” providing contextual annotation may be necessary to preserve cultural intent and avert misinterpretation.

## 3. Contrastive Analysis on the Cultural Connotations of English-Chinese Plant Words

Cultural connotations embedded in English and Chinese plant vocabulary often diverge due to disparities in natural environment, cognitive patterns, and religious beliefs. However, certain botanical terms, such as laurel, peach blossom, and rose, share overlapping symbolic meanings across both Chinese and Western cultures, reflecting converging global values.

### 3.1 The Similarities of Cultural Connotations between English and Chinese Plant Words

Linguistic commonalities arise not from coincidence but from shared cultural underpinnings. As language is a mirror of culture, similarities between languages stem from shared cultural elements. Universally, humans experience emotions like joy, anger, and sorrow, and face hardships such as illness and death. Thus, some plant-related words may share denotative and connotative meanings across cultures. Overcoming cross-cultural communication barriers is therefore both necessary and urgent.

#### 3.1.1 Laurel

Laurel symbolizes praise and honor in both Chinese and Western cultures. In ancient China, achieving the highest rank in imperial examinations was termed “winning the laurel” (折桂), signifying great scholarly success. Similarly, in Anglo-American literature, the title Poet Laureate (桂冠诗人) honors exceptional literary achievement, underscoring the shared cultural association of laurel with excellence and distinction.

#### 3.1.2 Peach

The peach, a fruit with crimson-yellow skin, symbolizes beauty in both cultures. In Chinese, “面似桃花” (face like a peach blossom) describes radiant beauty, paralleling the English idiom “She is a peach” (她真是个美人). Additionally, peach connotes excellence, as in “口作樱桃红” (lips like cherries) and “What a peach of a room!” (多漂亮的房间!).

### 3.1.3 Rose

In the West, no flower is as popular as the rose. The rose is widely recognized as a symbol of love, a meaning deeply rooted in both Chinese and Western cultures. It is worth noting that love remains a timeless motif in global poetry. For example, Robert Burns’ *A Red, Red Rose* (1794) employs the rose to evoke passion and loveliness:

“O, my lure’s like a red rose  
That’s newly sprung in June”

Nowadays, Valentine’s Day has gained popularity among Chinese youth, with men customarily gifting roses to express affection. The surge in demand often leads to sellouts on this occasion, reflecting the universal resonance of the rose’s romantic symbolism.

## 3.2 The Differences of Cultural Connotations between English and Chinese Plant Words

Cultural perspectives and environmental contexts shape divergent interpretations of plants, imbuing identical botanical terms with distinct connotations across languages. In Chinese tradition, plants have long been linked to human virtues and spiritual ideals, while Western cultures have developed a codified “language of flowers,” where each species carries specific symbolism. For example, pink blooms signify pure love; lotus represents estranged affection; daffodil convey regret; and cedar embodies loyalty. Sending hazel expresses a wish to reconcile after a conflict, red geraniums signal acceptance, and red roses denote love; striped carnations symbolize rejection, while Chinese primroses signify approval. Mistletoe and holly, representing remembrance and perseverance, offer solace to friends in adversity. In China, willow branches are gifted to departing friends, while the homophonic wordplay of “lotus seed” (莲子 liánzǐ) evokes romantic yearning (恋子 liànzǐ), as seen in the poem: “无端隔水抛莲子，遥被人知半日羞” (Casually tossing lotus seeds across the water, half a day’s shyness betrays my secret longing). Such floral symbolism highlights the rich expressiveness of plant metaphors in cross-cultural communication.

In Chinese culture, plants also embody pronounced gender dichotomy. Due to the perceived affinities between women and flowers, the latter have long served as symbolic metaphors for the former. A dignified and graceful woman is likened to the peony (牡丹), known as the “queen of flowers” and symbol of national beauty and heavenly fragrance. The most attractive girl in a school is termed “school flower” (校花), while a socialite is a “social butterfly” (交际花). Poetic verses like “The west wind lifts the curtain; she’s thinner than the yellow chrysanthemum” (“帘卷西风，人比黄花瘦”) and “How long can bright beauty last? Adrift, it vanishes without trace” (“明媚鲜妍能几时，一朝漂泊难寻觅”) reinforce this analogy between floral transience and feminine fragility.

In *A Dream of Red Mansions*, the peony represents Xue Baochai (wealth), lotus symbolizes Xiang Ling (purity), and plum blossom embodies Li Wan (steadfastness). Floral names such as “牡丹” (peony), “梅花” (plum), and “荷花” (lotus) are ubiquitous for women, while Chinese folklore depicts flower fairies, like those in *Flowers in the Mirror*, exclusively as female.

By contrast, tall trees are often associated with men. Tall and straight trees that withstand cold and wind symbolize male strength and resilience. Many men are named after trees, such as pine (松), cypress (柏), birch (桦), poplar (杨), locust (槐), and bamboo (竹). In *Journey to the West*, the tree spirits Tang Priest meets, such as Master Pine (十八公), Master Cypress (孤直公), Master Cedar (凌空子), and Master Bamboo (佛云叟), are all male, illustrating the symbolic hierarchy where feminine-floral associations are more nuanced than masculine-arboreal links.

Western culture employs fewer floral names for women (rose, violet, jasmine), with plant-deity correlations rooted in Greco-Roman mythology: laurel (Apollo), lily (Juno/Virgin Mary), myrtle (Venus), narcissus (Ceres), oak (Jupiter), and olive (Minerva). China’s vast territory and ancient civilization have fostered a unique plant culture. The plum blossom, orchid, bamboo, and chrysanthemum are known as the “Four Gentlemen” (花中四君子), while the plum blossom, bamboo, and pine are called the “Three Friends of Winter” (岁寒三友). These plants carry rich symbolic meanings in folklore and idioms such as “兰心蕙质” (elegant and refined), “金兰之交” (deep and sincere friendship), and “芝兰之室” (a noble home). However, most of these cultural connotations cannot be translated directly into English, as Western plant symbolism is influenced primarily by classical mythology. Similarly, many plants have unique cultural meanings in the West that are not found in China, and vice versa. For example, the lily’s religious connotations or the daffodil’s link to narcissism—creates interpretive gaps in cross-cultural discourse.

### 3.2.1 Pine

The pine tree, enduring harsh environments and maintaining year-round verdancy, has long symbolized eternity and the perseverance of noble scholars in Chinese culture. As stated in *The Analects of Confucius*, “Pine and cypress trees are the last to shed their leaves even in the coldest weather” (岁寒，然后知松柏之后凋也). The lines “Braving the wind, its strength is known; bearing snow, its virtue shows” (凌风知劲节，负雪见贞心) praise the virtues of heroes who endure hardship. Additionally, pine represents longevity, as expressed in sayings like “May your happiness be like the flowing waters of the East Sea, and your life as enduring as the undying pine of the Southern Mountain” (福如东海长流水，寿似南山不倒松) and “longevity like the pine and the crane” (松龄鹤寿).

In Western culture, however, the oak often supplants the pine as a symbol of resilience. Revered in Britain, the oak represents stoicism and strength—legend has it that Charles II sought refuge in an oak tree to evade enemies, inspiring the idiom “a heart of oak” to describe unwavering courage.

### 3.2.2 Bamboo

With its tall stature and resilient texture, bamboo has long symbolized integrity and fortitude in Chinese tradition, leading ancient hermits to plant and venerate it. Zheng Banqiao, a Qing Dynasty poet-painter, was renowned for both his bamboo paintings and verses:

“Clinging to green mountains, it never relents;  
Rooted deep in fractured rocks, its base is firm.  
Through thousands of trials, it stands unbowed;  
Let winds blow from all four quarters, it remains unshaken.” (咬定青山不放松，立根原在破岩中。千磨万击还坚劲，任尔东西南北风。)

Another poem expresses gratitude to mentors:

“New bamboo shoots tower above the old;  
All thrive with the old stalks’ support.  
When new growth emerges next year,  
Tenfold descendants will circle the phoenix pond.” (新竹高于旧竹枝，全凭老杖为扶持。明年再有新生者，十丈龙孙绕凤池。)

Lin Daiyu, one of the heroines in *A Dream of the Red Mansions*, deeply cherished bamboo; her residence, The Bamboo Lodge (潇湘馆), was surrounded by dense and lush bamboo groves. Su Shi, one of the Eight Great Prose Masters between the Tang and Song Dynasties, famously wrote: “I would rather go without meat than live without bamboo; no meat makes one thin, but no bamboo makes one vulgar.” (宁可食无肉，不可居无竹，无肉使人瘦，无竹使人俗。) Bamboo, however, holds limited cultural significance in the West, primarily due to climatic constraints that restrict its growth and symbolic adoption.

### 3.2.3 Plum Blossom

Blooming defiantly in harsh winters, the plum blossom has long been lauded for its elegance and purity. Lu You, a well-known patriotic poet of the Southern Song Dynasty, infused the plum blossom with moral integrity in his verse: “By the broken bridge beyond the post station, alone it blooms untended” (驿外断桥边，寂寞开无主), depicting its solitary resilience in winter. Generations of Chinese people have learned a life philosophy from the plum blossom’s flowering pattern: no sweetness without sweat. Only through determined effort can one reach the top. As illustrated in verses like “A few plum branches by the wall, blooming alone in the cold” (墙角数枝梅，凌寒独自开) and “The sword’s edge comes from grinding; plum fragrance rises from bitter cold” (宝剑锋从磨砺出，梅花香自苦寒来), perseverance through adversity is essential to excellence. Even amid “hundred-foot ice on the cliff,” its blossoms remain vibrant (已是悬崖百丈冰，犹有花枝俏)。

Lin Bu, the Song Dynasty poet famed for “taking plum as wife and crane as son” (梅妻鹤子), embodied this ethos by living in seclusion at West Lake, Hangzhou, eschewing marriage to cultivate plum trees and raise cranes. Legend has it that his cranes would call to announce visitors, transforming “梅妻鹤子” into a symbol of hermitic nobility. The plum also heralds early spring, blooming as other flowers wither. Wang Mian, a Yuan Dynasty artist-poet, captured its unassuming virtue in his poem:

“By my ink-washing pool grows a plum tree,  
Each bloom a faint ink trace;  
It seeks no praise for its hue,  
But leaves pure fragrance filling heaven and earth.” (我家洗砚池头树，朵朵花开淡墨痕。不要人夸好颜色，只留清气满乾坤。)

### 3.2.4 Daffodil

The daffodil represents a beautiful girl in China and is often referred to as “凌波仙子” (the fairy of the rippling waves). In contrast, in the West, the daffodil symbolizes joy. Western poets frequently use the daffodil to evoke springtime and happiness. William Wordsworth, a British Lake Poet and poet laureate, famously celebrated this flower in his poem “The Daffodils.”

In Chinese culture, the daffodil is personified as the “Fairy of Rippling Waves” (凌波仙子), evoking images of graceful maidens. Western symbolism, however, centers on joy and renewal, with poets often using daffodils to celebrate spring. William Wordsworth, the British Lake Poet and Poet Laureate, immortalized this in *The Daffodils*:

“And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.”

He compares golden daffodils to shining stars and sparking waves. How happy the poet is! This contrasts sharply with Chinese iconography, where the flower’s ethereal beauty is tied to feminine grace rather than seasonal merriment.

### 3.2.5 Palm

The palm tree is honored as the “tree of life” in the West. It symbolizes victory. In ancient Rome, fighters in the arena regarded palm leaves or palm branches as symbols of triumph. Medals often bear the design of palm leaves, and “bearing the palm” means winning a prize.

The palm also carries religious significance: according to the Bible, crowds greeted Jesus with palm branches during his entry into Jerusalem, an event commemorated by the Christian tradition of Palm Sunday—the final Sunday before Easter - when churches are decorated with palm fronds.

### 3.2.6 Other Vegetables and Fruits

Vegetables and fruits carry rich connotations in Western culture, but not as much in Chinese culture. In English-speaking cultures, for example, cabbage can refer to a girl; pumpkin can mean a village; cabbage head and pumpkin head both imply a fool; cucumber symbolizes calmness; a hot potato refers to a thorny or difficult problem; garlic signifies something unpopular (likely due to its pungent odor).

Some common idioms include “feeling one’s oats” (meaning excitement) and “giving someone beans” (meaning punishment). The carrot-and-stick approach describes a method of persuasion using a reward and a punishment. Additionally, surnames like Wheat, Orange, Corn, and Rice are found in Western countries.

## 4. Social Factors for Cultural Connotation Differences of English-Chinese Plant Words

Thinking patterns, religious beliefs, and natural environments are pivotal social factors influencing different cultural meanings of English and Chinese plant words. Grammatically, Chinese tend to use parataxis, placing clauses or phrases side by side without explicit connectors, while Western languages often use hypotaxis, employing subordinating conjunctions to show clear logical relationships.

### 4.1 Thinking Patterns

Chinese culture emphasizes imagistic and metaphorical thinking, often expressed through vivid metaphors and similes. For example, classical Chinese novels often describe a girl’s beauty with expressions like “eyebrows like green mountains, face like lotus petals, lips like cherries, fingers like scallions” (眉似青山, 脸如莲萼, 唇缀樱桃, 指如削葱). In contrast, Western cultures focus more on formal analysis and logical reasoning, favoring precise definitions and direct explanations. Emotionally, Chinese expression is often implicit and subtle, while Western expression tends to be more direct and explicit. Philosophically, Chinese thought views humanity as integral to nature, seeking harmony (e.g., modeling virtue on pine resilience), whereas Western traditions sometimes portray humans as separate from nature. For instance, in the Biblical story, Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise after eating the Forbidden Fruit, leading to humanity’s punishment through hardship, hunger, floods, and illness, as a consequence of their disobedience.

### 4.2 Religious Influences

Religion profoundly shapes cultural symbolism. In China, Daoism (indigenous) and Buddhism (imported during the Han Dynasty) have influenced plant connotations. Buddhist iconography often depicts Sakyamuni and Avalokitesvara seated on lotus thrones; legend holds that lotuses bloomed when Sakyamuni was born. The flower’s ability to grow pure from mud embodies Buddhist ideals of detachment, making it a sacred symbol in Chinese Buddhism.

Christianity, central to European culture for two millennia, has imprinted plant symbolism through the Bible. Phrases like “olive branch” (symbol of peace) and “fig leaf” (modesty) derive from Biblical stories, enduring in Western literature. For example, the olive branch brought by the dove to Noah signified the end of the Flood, while fig leaves became synonymous with shame after Adam and Eve’s transgression. These religious associations starkly contrast with Chinese plant iconography rooted in secular philosophy and literary tradition.

### 4.3 Natural Environmental Influences

Every nation lives and grows within a specific environment. Culture cannot develop properly without its environmental foundation. Different environments give rise to distinct cultural characteristics. Some plants thrive only in particular climates and regions. For example, Britain’s temperate maritime climate is ideal for growing roses and mushrooms. No flower rivals the rose in Western cultural symbolism. In 15th-century England, two feudal families, the House of York and the House of Lancaster, used the red rose and white rose as their emblems; following the Wars of the Roses, their combined red and white rose became the emblem of the English royal family.

In contrast, China’s Yangtze River Delta, with its moderate climate, supports abundant bamboo cultivation. Bamboo’s vigorous growth is captured in the Chinese idiom “spring bamboo shoots after rain” (雨后春笋), denoting rapid emergence of many new things. Since bamboo is scarce in Britain, the equivalent idiom is “spring up like mushrooms.”

Additionally, as an agricultural country focused on rice cultivation, China endows the character “米” (rice) with rich cultural connotations.

## 5. Significance for Studying Cultural Connotations of English-Chinese Plant Words

Contrastive studies play a pivotal role in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, especially with the growing global popularity of Chinese language learning. Such analyses help learners overcome cultural barriers and improve cultural awareness. Translation, as a bridge for cross-cultural communication, involves not merely linguistic conversion but deep cultural interpretation, making it indispensable for international communication.

### 5.1 Implications for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

Teaching Chinese as a foreign language, aimed at fostering global understanding of Chinese culture and facilitating effective cross - cultural communication, has gained significant momentum in recent years. For educators, mastering professional linguistics and adeptly analyzing cultural disparities are essential. Teachers should tailor their approach to students’ cultural backgrounds, adopting a comparative teaching methodology rooted in contrastive research.

Foreign language teachers should impart not only the literal meanings of words but also their cultural connotations to students. A practical teaching framework involves first explaining word origins and literal meanings, then comparing their cultural implications in English and Chinese, for example, terms like “red bean” “Four Gentlemen” and “Three Friends of

Winter” as discussed above, to deepen students’ understanding. Such pedagogical strategies also require ongoing research into cultural nuances to showcase the richness of Chinese civilization globally.

For international students, deeply ingrained native cultural biases may unconsciously breed resistance to Chinese culture. Contrastive study can raise their cultural awareness and help eliminate bias. Ultimately, this process enables learners to overcome psychological barriers, fostering cultural reciprocity and mutual understanding.

Vocabulary size directly influences language proficiency in second-language acquisition. Lexical denotations may not be self-evident from context alone. For example, “daffodil” in Chinese symbolizes elegance and refinement, but in English, it can imply arrogance and stubbornness. By exploring the cultural connotations behind words, learners can uncover rich historical traditions, customs, and lifestyles embedded within the language.

## 5.2 The Significance of English and Chinese Translation

Translation is a nuanced craft that extends beyond mere linguistic conversion. Before translating, translators should fully understand the cultural backgrounds of different languages. Misunderstandings of cultures often make translation difficult. Fortunately, English and Chinese share many common points, and in most cases, literal translation can preserve the original meaning. Still, free translation should be adopted under certain circumstances. For example, in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* [15], the phrase “In the most high and palmy state of Rome” uses “palm” to symbolize victory and honor in English. The word “palmy” was coined by Shakespeare. Since the palm tree lacks this symbolic resonance in Chinese, the coinage “palmy” is artfully rendered as “全盛时期” (heyday) in Bian Zhilin’s translation: “从前, 在全盛时期的罗马.” This demonstrates how cultural gap-filling is essential for semantic accuracy.

Idiomatic expressions further illustrate this necessity. The Chinese metaphor “springing up like bamboo shoots after rain” (雨后春笋) is appropriately translated as “spring up like mushrooms” in English to avoid misunderstanding. Additionally, translating Chinese poetry is especially challenging. Literal translation can sometimes lead to misinterpretation. Therefore, strategies such as literal translation, literal translation with notes, and free translation have been commonly used. For instance, “potatoes and roses” is translated as “粗茶淡饭” (plain and simple food), and “He is practically off his opinion about her” is translated as “他对她简直是神魂颠倒” (he is completely infatuated with her).

## 6. Conclusion

Cultural connotations of plant words differ greatly between English and Chinese due to variations in environmental contexts, cognitive patterns, and religious beliefs. Similar differences appear in words related to animals, food, and colors. Since cultural connotations are deeply embedded in daily life, plant words warrant special attention in intercultural communication. These differences stem from each culture’s unique traditions and habits, making mutual understanding challenging. Often, these differences outweigh similarities, hindering effective intercultural exchange. Cultures shape languages, in turn influencing how people think and act. Since individuals view language through their own cultural lens, language learners must engage deeply with other cultures to understand connotations, rather than relying solely on personal experience. This paper examines the cultural connotation differences of English and Chinese plant words to reduce misunderstandings in intercultural communication. A nuanced grasp of these connotations is indispensable for achieving accuracy in translation, as it bridges the gap between linguistic forms and their cultural underpinnings.

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