The Fragrant Orchid is a symbol of the neglected scholar. The rich symbolism of the orchid flower is expressed in the saying that "the orchid in the soil is like the scholar in society." The orchid’s fragrant blossoms are a metaphor for the intellectual pursuits of the scholar, who, like the orchid, may not be well-known or appreciated in his lifetime, but whose contributions will ultimately be celebrated.

The drive to produce a screen such as this, hundreds of layers of lacquer would be required.

In the early sixteenth century, Nurchis, a tribal chieftain who claimed descent from the Jurchen who ruled during the Jin dynasty (1115-1260), united the nomadic tribes of southern China. He was succeeded in 1234 by his fourth son, Emperor Yongzheng. Reigning from 1723 to 1735, Yongzheng reformed the imperial bureaucracy and gave Confucian ideas new vitality. His reign is celebrated by the construction of the Forbidden City, a re-establishment of the importance of the imperial courts, and a return to the Confucian classics and Confucian values. The Qianlong emperor, a great admirer of the arts and crafts, is known for his patronage of the arts and his support of the arts and crafts.

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