



# The Empty Pot

## A Folktale From China

Chung chin, (once upon a time), there was a Chinese emperor who loved nature. The emperor was very old, and it was time for him to choose who would be the next emperor after him. Since this emperor loved nature so much, he decided to use plants to help him choose. One spring day, the emperor called all of the children in the kingdom together.

He said, “It is time for me to choose who will be the next emperor when it is time for me to stop leading China. I have decided to choose one of you, the children in my kingdom! Today, I will give every child one very special seed. I want each of you to go home and plant your seed and take good care of it for one year. One year from today, you will all come back to the palace with what you have grown, and I will use your plants to decide who will be emperor!”



The children and their families were all very excited, but no one was more excited than a little boy named Ling. Ling loved nature as much as the emperor. He loved to work in his family's beautiful garden and knew how to take good care of plants. He was sure that he could grow the most beautiful plant of all.

Ling lined up with all of the other children to receive his seed. When the Emperor pressed the seed into Ling's palm, Ling's heart began to race. He ran all the way home, filled a flower pot with soil, and carefully planted his seed right away. Ling watered his seed every day and made sure that it had plenty of sunshine. He couldn't wait to see what would grow!

Day after day, Ling watched and waited, but nothing grew in his pot. Soon, the other children started talking about their sprouts and seedlings. Ling began to worry about his seed. He transferred it to a new, bigger pot — which he filled with fresh soil. He kept watering the seed carefully, but nothing grew. Weeks and months passed, and the other children were talking about the flowers starting to bloom on their plants. Still, Ling only had a pot filled with dirt. There was no flower — not even a sprout! He was devastated!

Finally, spring came and all of the children in the kingdom put on their best clothes to return to the palace with their plants. Ling was worried about what the emperor and the other children would think of his empty pot, but his mother encouraged him. She said, "You worked hard and did your best. Be proud of your hard work!" So Ling followed the other children to the palace, carrying his empty pot in his hands.

When Ling arrived at the palace, the courtyard was filled with children all carrying the most beautiful blooms. The air smelled sweet from all of the flowers. Yet the Emperor was frowning. He went one by one slowly looking at every bloom. Finally, he came to Ling holding his empty pot.

"Why have you brought me an empty pot?" the emperor asked. Ling felt so ashamed that he started to cry. He said, "Your highness, I tried my best. I planted the seed that you gave me right away. I watered it every day and made sure it got plenty of sunlight. I even sang to it! But nothing grew. I tried moving it to a bigger pot with fresh soil and tried watering it with water from a different stream, but my seed would not grow. So today, I bring you an empty pot."

To Ling's surprise, the Emperor smiled! He looked at the crowd of children and said, "Children, one year ago I gave you all seeds to plant. What I didn't tell you then is that all of the seeds had been boiled and would never grow. The flowers and plants that you brought to me today could not have grown from the seeds that I gave you. Only this boy here with the empty pot was honest. And so, he shall be your new Emperor!"

