

## Golden 311

### Chapter 311 Experts (Part Two)

In the antique trade, items are valued for their provenance, and similarly, collectors also value their lineage and background. Zhuang Rui, having apprenticed under Uncle De, was considered part of the circle, and Jin Pangzi and others immediately became more enthusiastic towards him. Mentoring a younger generation is standard practice in the trade.

The man nicknamed Sun Wukong was a close friend of Uncle De, so he naturally treated Zhuang Rui as his junior. After calling Zhuang Rui over, he asked about Uncle De's recent situation.

"Zhuang Rui? Zhuang Rui, why does that name sound so familiar?"

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's name, the ceramics appraisal expert named Tian Fan frowned as if deep in thought. Suddenly, his eyes lit up, and disregarding the car's jolting, he stood up and darted to the row of seats where Zhuang Rui was sitting, saying, "Little Zhuang, didn't you buy something at Panjiayuan the day before yesterday?"

Zhuang Rui was startled by the old man who suddenly rushed over. Judging from his age, he should be over fifty. Yet he was so agile. However, after hearing Tian Fan's words, Zhuang Rui was stunned. How did the news from the afternoon before yesterday spread so quickly?

As mentioned earlier, the circulation of antiques, besides buying and selling, also involves private exchanges among collectors. Beijing may seem like a big city, but most people in this industry know each other. After Zhuang Rui left, that shopkeeper immediately spread the word.

It should be noted that Longshan black pottery is not only highly collectible, but also of great archaeological value, making it one of the few fine examples of pottery. Tian Fan has been immersed in ceramics all his life, so he naturally cares a lot about this kind of thing. When the shopkeeper mentioned it, he took notice, which is why he reacted this way.

"Xiao Zhuang, I don't mean anything by it, I just wanted to ask if you found that item?"

Seeing everyone in the car staring at him, Tian Fan blushed and felt a little embarrassed. Although Tian Fan and Fatty Jin both worked at the Palace Museum, Fatty Jin often participated in social activities, while Tian Fan stayed at the office all day doing research and was a bit dull.

"Yes, I found a piece of Longshan black pottery in Panjiayuan the day before yesterday. I was pretty lucky. The owner of Cilaifang told you, right?" Zhuang Rui readily admitted to finding bargains on his own.

"Hey, it really is you? What a coincidence! I was just about to ask Lao Na to arrange a meeting with you, Xiao Zhuang. After we finish the show and go back to Beijing, could you let this old man see your Longshan black pottery?"

Tian Fan followed up, saying that the number of fine black pottery pieces in existence is extremely small. Even he had only seen one or two pieces, and they were all somewhat damaged. If the car hadn't been heading towards Jinan, he would have wanted to take Zhuang Rui to see the piece right away.

"Okay, no problem..."

Zhuang Rui readily agreed. Although Tian Fan was not well-known, his status as a researcher at the Palace Museum made him someone worth befriending. Perhaps he would even have the opportunity to see the vast collection of artifacts in the Palace Museum.

"Xiao Zhuang, I didn't know you had this trick up your sleeve. Not everyone gets to snag a bargain like this. Come on, tell us about it..."

After receiving Zhuang Rui's definite answer, Old Man Tian sat back down contentedly. He only wanted to see the object and didn't care how Zhuang Rui obtained it. However, Fatty Jin and the others became interested and sat down around Zhuang Rui.

Everyone enjoys listening to stories. It wasn't just the people in the antique trade who were interested; even the film crew, including the driver, perked up their ears to listen. It was like winning the lottery—it was like winning the grand prize.

Collecting things is a mysterious thing for ordinary people, and finding a bargain on Taobao is even more legendary. This has an extraordinary attraction for ordinary people.

Liu Jia's gaze toward Zhuang Rui changed at this moment. She was worried that he would be out of place with these experts and affect the filming of the program. However, she did not expect that this unassuming young man would become friends with everyone so quickly and now he was subtly guiding the conversation around him.

At this point, Director Zhu seemed a bit embarrassed. Several experts had overheard his remarks about Zhuang Rui. Although they wouldn't stand up for Zhuang Rui, they became somewhat lukewarm when trying to strike up a conversation with Director Zhu.

"Mr. Zhuang, you bought that black pottery for 1,000 yuan, I wonder how much it's worth?"

After Zhuang Rui finished speaking, the bearded middle-aged man carrying the camera who got into the car asked, "They don't care about the research value of this object; what matters is how much it can sell for."

"Let me explain. Since Longshan black pottery first appeared in 1936, quite a few pieces have been unearthed and can be found all over Shandong. However, very few are of high quality. If the firing technique of Xiao Zhuang's piece of black pottery could reach the level of the one Mr. Liang had back then, the market price would probably be at least six million..."

The speaker was General Manager Qian of the Kyoto Auction House. He was very knowledgeable about the market prices of all kinds of antiques. After speaking, he looked at Zhuang Rui and said, "Xiao Zhuang, how about it? Are you interested in selling that black pottery? I can arrange a special auction for you and guarantee a transaction price of over seven million."

The auction house's revenue mainly comes from the commissions after the items are sold. The commissions charged by each auction house are different, but they are generally above 12%. Taking Zhuang Rui's black pottery as an example, if it can be sold for seven million, the auction house can earn at least 800,000. So when General Manager Qian learned that Zhuang Rui had this item, he immediately had an idea.

"Hehe, I recently bought a courtyard house in Xuanwu, and it's being renovated. I was thinking of acquiring a few more items, so I'll keep this one for myself. But I'll definitely need to trouble Mr. Qian when the opportunity arises..."

Zhuang Rui's words caused everyone to gasp in shock. They were all Beijingers or had lived in Beijing for decades, so they naturally knew that the courtyard Zhuang Rui mentioned was a traditional courtyard house. Nowadays, even a small courtyard of a few hundred square meters costs around a million or eight million yuan. They never expected that this director of the Jade Association would be so wealthy.

Collectors aren't necessarily rich. Although the people in the car are well-known figures in the antique circle, they also earn a salary, and their wealth is far from comparable to Zhuang Rui's, not to mention the TV station staff. The girl doing makeup was now staring at Zhuang Rui with her eyes practically sparkling.

Master Zhu deeply regretted his attitude just now. In his mind, this young man's wealth was definitely not earned by him, but probably belonged to a wealthy family. His actions of offending him were extremely unwise.

Zhuang Rui's words above were actually said intentionally. In today's society, people associate your success with your wealth and status. The old-fashioned ideals of intellectuals have long been forgotten. Otherwise, these experts in the car wouldn't have been invited to participate in this treasure appraisal event.

Grandpa Gu had told Zhuang Rui that after this event, the red envelope would be no less than 30,000 yuan. Earning 30,000 yuan in two days, with food, accommodation, and a trip included, only a fool wouldn't come.

Zhuang Rui came to participate in this treasure appraisal event to make a name for himself in the jade industry. There was no need for him to play the low-key and humble role, as that would diminish the reputation of his elders, Grandpa Gu and Uncle De.

Sure enough, after Zhuang Rui said those words, the attitudes of the experts changed imperceptibly. Even the members of the TV crew who had previously looked down on Zhuang Rui, the young expert, started calling him "Teacher Zhuang" repeatedly, making Zhuang Rui feel a little embarrassed.

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Beijing is about 400 kilometers away from Jinan. Shandong's highways are famous throughout the country. After driving on the highway, we entered Jinan's territory around 11:30 a.m.

Jinan's name originates from Jinan Prefecture, established during the Western Han Dynasty, meaning "south of the Ji River." Also known as "City of Springs," it is the capital of Shandong Province, a major economic province on the eastern coast of China. It is one of the national historical and cultural cities designated by the State Council, and serves as the province's political, economic, cultural, scientific, educational, and financial center. It is also one of the coastal open cities approved by the state and one of the fifteen sub-provincial cities.

The birthplace of the world-renowned prehistoric Longshan Culture is located in Jinan. There is also the Neolithic site of Chengziya, the Qi Great Wall which predates the Qin Great Wall, and the Song Dynasty painted clay Arhat sculptures of Lingyan Temple, which are hailed as "the best sculptures in China".

Legend has it that Shun once "fished in Leize and farmed in Lishan". Lishan is the Thousand Buddha Mountain in the southern part of Jinan City. Therefore, there are still various place names named after Shun scattered in the city, such as "Shun Well", "Shun Farming Road" and "Shun Farming Mountain".

During the rainy season, Jinan presents a picturesque scene in areas with numerous springs, where "every household has a spring, and every house is lined with weeping willows." As early as the Song Dynasty, the writer Zeng Gong commented, "Qi has many sweet springs, which are the best in the world." The Yuan Dynasty geographer Yu Qin also praised it, saying, "Jinan's mountains and waters are the best in Shandong, and its springs are the best in the world."

At the highway exit leading into Jinan, a car with the words "Jinan TV Station" painted on its body was already waiting there.

After greeting the driver of the minibus carrying Zhuang Rui and the others, the vehicle led the way, driving directly into the parking lot of a five-star hotel. This amateur treasure appraisal event was being held at this hotel, and of course, the experts were also staying there.

At the hotel's main entrance, there was a large red banner that read "Promoting National Culture, Collecting and Appraising Treasures Worldwide," suggesting that Shandong Fangming had made considerable preparations beforehand.

In fact, this folk treasure appraisal event was hosted by Shandong, and Beijing TV was a sister organization because they had to get some resources, such as these six experts in long gowns walking in the hotel.

These days, aside from movie actors, who else would dress like this in a blue long gown? So when the experts appeared in the hotel, everyone's attention was drawn to them, and one foreigner even raised his camera to take pictures.

Zhuang Rui was quite uncomfortable, but seeing how calm and collected the others were, he had no choice but to bite the bullet and follow. Fortunately, the meal was in a private room; otherwise, if he were treated like a giant panda, Zhuang Rui didn't know if he would still have an appetite.

The Jinan authorities received a very high level of hospitality towards the expert group. In addition to the presence of the director and deputy director of Jinan TV, the vice mayor in charge of culture and education also came to toast the experts, deliver a speech, and then hurriedly left.

Although Zhuang Rui, an expert in jade appraisal, looked a bit young, the staff here didn't dare to neglect him because they saw how skilled the other experts were with him.

After dinner, the TV station staff gathered to discuss the specific details of the event, while Zhuang Rui and the other experts went to their hotel rooms to rest.

At 2:30 p.m., Zhuang Rui was woken up and met up with Jin Pangzi and the others. They took the elevator to the venue for this folk treasure appraisal - a large conference room on the first floor of the hotel.

At this moment, long queues had already formed in the corridors inside and outside the conference room, with many people holding or carrying various antiques, waiting for the experts to enter.

Chapter 312 Folk Treasure Appraisal (Part 1)

We live in an era of mass entertainment, where even antique appraisal has become a form of entertainment. When the experts enter, there's not only background music, but a beam of light closely follows them. The host accompanies the experts, introducing them to the audience, and each introduction is met with applause.

Back in 2004, experts and professors were highly respected. Several experts, with the air of renowned figures, bowed to the surroundings and took small steps to sit down behind the table.

When it was Zhuang Rui's turn to appear, things got a little awkward. Although the music and lights were just as good, and even Liu Jia's sweet voice was raised a bit higher, the crowd in the audience didn't seem to like it and booed. If it weren't for the valuable item in his hand, they probably would have thrown it at him like a rotten egg.

"Teacher Zhuang, it's alright. The meat in the bun isn't on the pleats. They'll need your help when they appraise the jade later."

Sitting next to Zhuang Rui, General Manager Qian, fearing that Zhuang Rui might be upset, whispered a word of comfort. Apart from him, who changed his address to "Teacher Zhuang Rui," the others all called Zhuang Rui "Little Zhuang," after all, there was a significant age difference between them.

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"It's alright, Mr. Qian. If you can't handle this kind of setback, then I wouldn't have come..."

Zhuang Rui smiled slightly, opened the bottle of mineral water in front of him and took a drink. This situation was exactly what he expected. If he were the owner of the treasure, he would probably have booed the appraiser if he saw that the expert was so young.

However, Zhuang Rui was still somewhat unconvinced. Let alone jade, even in the realm of antiques, if it came down to identifying authenticity, no one in the venue could compare to him. Of course, he only thought about it in his mind. Being an all-rounder wasn't so comfortable, and it only made him the target of people's jealousy.

"Distinguished guests, fellow collectors, welcome to the first 'Promoting National Culture, Collecting and Appraising Treasures Worldwide' folk appraisal event, jointly hosted by Beijing Television and Shandong Television. Now, please welcome Mayor Tan to speak..."

After the experts were seated, Liu Jia and a chubby male host from Shandong TV stood on the stage in front of Zhuang Rui and the others, taking turns hosting the event. Then, the vice mayor, who had made a brief appearance at noon, took the stage to speak. Fortunately, the vice mayor didn't give a long speech; after a few simple words, he announced the start of the appraisal event.

Shandong, as a traditional cultural city, has been visited by countless literati and scholars from various dynasties throughout history, resulting in a strong foundation for private collections. In addition, Shandong TV prepared the footage more than a week in advance, so today there were more than a thousand people who came to the scene and formed a long queue at the side entrance of the hotel. The queue was so long that many people even braved the sweltering heat to wait outside the hotel.

There was also a squadron of armed police officers maintaining order at the scene. Five meters away from the row of long tables where the experts were appraising the items, a cordon was set up with ropes. Because they were worried that several people would bring the same type of items, only three collectors were allowed to enter the cordon at a time with their belongings.

"Expert, could you please take a look at this thing? It was left to me by my elders. I saw it when I was four or five years old. It's quite strange (Jinan dialect: odd). Could you tell me if it's real?"

The first person to enter was a middle-aged man in his forties, dressed very plainly. Perhaps because of the heat, he was still wearing slippers. He was carrying a brownish-yellow jar in his arms. The jar was more than half a meter tall, with a large belly and a narrow mouth, and it looked quite heavy. The man was also breathing heavily when he spoke.

"Come on, let's put the things on the table first..."

This task fell to Tian Fan, a ceramics appraisal expert. He got up and asked the man to place the jar on the table in front of him, then took a magnifying glass and began to examine it.

Behind a row of tables covered with red silk sat six people. Zhuang Rui sat at the far end. After glancing at the other two, who weren't carrying jade items, he focused his attention on the jar the first person had brought. The jar had irregular patterns around its edges, but the more Zhuang Rui looked at it, the more it reminded him of the pickling jar his family used when he was a child. 6000.00

There were two people between Tian Fan and Zhuang Rui, so Zhuang Rui couldn't see very clearly. He simply released his spiritual energy and entered the vat, only to find that the vat's interior was of poor quality, unevenly fired, and had no spiritual energy at all. He guessed it was really a pickle vat. At this time, Tian Fan finished looking and sat back down.

Seeing that Tian Fan had examined it with a magnifying glass and then sat back down, the middle-aged man became anxious and said, "Expert, please look more closely! This thing existed when my grandfather was alive..."

"This is a jar used for pickling vegetables. It still smells of pickled vegetables. It's quite old, probably produced before the liberation. However, it's crudely made and produced in large quantities, so it has no collectible value. You should take it back." Tian Fan pushed up his glasses and said something that disappointed the middle-aged man.

"Isn't it said that anything that has been preserved for a long time is an antique? I had to bring this all the way from home. Expert, are you sure this thing isn't worth anything?"

The middle-aged man was somewhat unwilling and asked another question. After seeing Tian Fan nod, he picked up the pickled vegetable jar from the table and left, cursing.

Zhuang Rui was quite shocked by this person. Treating a pickle jar like a treasure? Is this what folk treasure appraisal is all about?

Old Sun, who was sitting one seat away from Zhuang Rui, smiled and said after seeing the expression on Zhuang Rui's face, "Don't be surprised. These people all feel that their things are treasures. If you tell them the truth, sometimes they will think that we are deceiving them. Old Tian has a bit of a straightforward temper, and he has always been like this. Young Zhuang, don't make any promises you can't keep. If you can't see through the truth, just say you can't tell."

Zhuang Rui laughed upon hearing this. It seemed that this phrase was indeed jargon in the industry. Old Master Gu had taught him to say it, and now the person beside him was saying it as well. It was truly universally applicable.

Young man, this thing is older than you, but not by much. It's a print from the 1960s. If it were kept for a few more decades, it might become an antique. But it's still a bit too young for this."

Zhuang Rui was chatting and laughing with Old Sun when Jin Pangzi's voice came from the side. It turned out that he had finished appraising the item he had been examining. The person he had appraised was holding a fan, which was said to be an authentic work by Tang Bohu. After examining it, Jin Pangzi was both amused and exasperated. It was just a print from the 1960s. He had no choice but to ask the person to leave.

Because there were too many people coming to have their artifacts appraised, the organizers and experts discussed the matter and decided that different types of artifacts could be appraised at the same time. This way, all six experts could be busy, and the speed of appraising the items could be increased.

As a result, everyone except Zhuang Rui became busy. Perhaps because there were relatively few people who collected ancient jade, none of the twenty-odd people who came up one after another were appraising jade artifacts. Zhuang Rui seemed to have some free time, but this suited him just fine. He watched with great interest as the other experts appraised the objects.

Among these antiques, calligraphy and paintings were the most numerous, and Fatty Jin was the busiest person. He examined eleven calligraphy and painting works and identified them all as fakes. His eye for art was extremely sharp and unique. Zhuang Rui had used his spiritual energy to examine them, and Fatty Jin had not made a single mistake. Zhuang Rui could not help but admire him.

Xiao Zhuang, you should be familiar with miscellaneous items since you've been following Brother Ma, right? Come on, take a look at this snuff bottle."

Seeing that Zhuang Rui was looking around with nothing to do, Old Sun handed him a cloisonné snuff bottle that he was playing with.

"The item is fake..."

Zhuang Rui took it and pretended to look at it with a magnifying glass before giving the answer.

"Hey young man, you can eat whatever you want, but you can't just say whatever you want. This snuff bottle has been in my hands for quite a few years." Zhuang Rui didn't realize that his words were a bit too direct, which angered the owner of the object.

Zhuang Rui glanced up and saw that the owner of the snuff bottle was an old man in his fifties, dressed quite elegantly, who was looking at him with a resentful expression.

"Xiao Zhuang, how can you be so sure it's fake?" Old Sun also wanted to test Zhuang Rui.

"The murals inside this thing were painted on after it was already fired. How could it not be fake?" Zhuang Rui blurted out. When he used his spiritual energy to look at it, he discovered that the murals and the glass bottle were not fired together at all.

"That's impossible. I washed it with water when I bought it a while ago. If I painted on it later, the color would definitely come off."

The owner of the snuff bottle grew increasingly displeased, but he inadvertently let slip that the object was not, as he claimed, something that had been in his possession for many years.

Zhuang Rui thought for a moment, then picked up a single-headed, long-handled cotton swab from the table, which was prepared for wiping objects. He dipped it in the alcohol in the bottle in front of him. These items were provided by the organizers and were frequently used during the identification process.

Zhuang Rui dipped a cotton swab in alcohol and rubbed it vigorously inside the snuff bottle for a while. Then he took the swab out and placed it in front of the snuff bottle's owner, saying, "Uncle, there's a lot of pigment in this stuff that can't be washed off with water. You should be more careful when buying this stuff in the future..."

The old man blushed deeply after Zhuang Rui's words, but looking at the color on the cotton swab, he couldn't utter a single word in rebuttal. He snatched the snuff bottle from Zhuang Rui's hand and slipped out of the crowd.

"Good, not bad, you've learned a bit from Brother Ma." Old Sun gave Zhuang Rui a thumbs up after seeing how Zhuang Rui had humiliated the old man who wanted to take advantage of him with just a few words.

The TV station is hosting this program, and if the items are identified as genuine antiques, they will issue an authentication certificate. As a result, there will be some people who try to pass off fakes as genuine antiques. You should know that after being authenticated by these experts, the certificate issued can immediately turn a worthless fake antique into a genuine item worth a fortune.

#### Chapter 313 Folk Treasure Appraisal (Part Two)

Every dynasty in China produced a large number of counterfeit antiques, all driven by profit. However, modern collectors have become more savvy; they generally don't act unless they are absolutely certain of their investment, rarely spending huge sums on items they are unsure about.

As a result, many antique dealers are finding it difficult to make a living, because they mainly make money from high-quality fakes. So some people go to great lengths to repackage their fake items and then resell them.

This "package" refers to the certificate of authenticity issued by experts or professional institutions. Ordinary people generally trust experts or professional institutions. With this "package," counterfeit antiques can not only be sold as genuine, but their prices can also rival those of genuine antiques.

People with this mentality are not just antique dealers. Some collectors who have been fooled and paid tuition fees will also bring out fake items, hoping to make a quick buck by getting a certificate of authenticity and then earning back the money they spent. In short, there are all sorts of people with different intentions.

Since ancient times, there has been a saying in the antique world: "There is no such thing as a fake antique." Antique transactions are based on the principle of cash on delivery. As for whether the item being sold is genuine or fake, the seller is not obligated to tell you. Whether the item you buy is good or bad depends entirely on your judgment. You have to accept the goods regardless of their quality, and there is no reason to return them.

However, with record-breaking prices for numerous items at auctions in recent years, the art market has once again become a hot investment. Many people are spending their entire fortunes just to buy a few antiques of dubious authenticity, dreaming of getting rich overnight.

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How can you sleep soundly with hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars worth of dubious items at home? The answer is simple—certificates. These days, a stamped piece of paper is more effective than anything else. Even giants like Microsoft and Shanda have suffered in silence.

While many people share this view, most of the people present today are unsure about the authenticity of the antiques they own and want to have them appraised by experts.

Just now at Zhuang Rui's table, no one took the initiative to come up to him for appraisal. The main reason is that Zhuang Rui looks too young and doesn't have the demeanor of an expert. So many people are afraid to have their collections appraised by Zhuang Rui. What if their items are genuine but he says they are fake?

However, there were only six experts on the stage, while thousands of eyes were watching from below. Zhuang Rui's actions in appraising the snuff bottle were also seen by many people. As soon as the old man who wanted to take advantage left, two people came over to Zhuang Rui's table.

"Professor Zhuang, could you please take a look at this manuscript? Is it an antique?"

The person walking in front placed a wooden box in front of Zhuang Rui. [69HUX.COM](http://69HUX.COM)

"I'm sorry, this mainly focuses on jade artifacts. For calligraphy and paintings, you should contact Teacher Jin."

Although Zhuang Rui was a little curious, he couldn't take away someone else's job, so he told the other person to go and get in line, since Fatty Jin was the busiest person right now.

"Teacher Zhuang, this is a jade artifact, could you please take a look at it?"

The second person to come up also carried a box about the size of a palm and placed it in front of Zhuang Rui.

Zhuang Rui opened the box and saw five jade figures, each about the size of a thumb, carved from white jade. Some had a drum hanging from their waists, some held a drumstick high in their hands, and others were in a kneeling posture. The five jade figures were all different in shape, and their facial expressions were vividly depicted. They also had obvious patina. Judging from their appearance, they should be a set of jade carvings reflecting ancient sacrificial rituals.

He held them in his hands and examined them for a while. The patina was quite thick. When Zhuang Rui raised the magnifying glass, his spiritual energy silently seeped into these small objects. Upon closer inspection, Zhuang Rui was greatly disappointed. He had thought he would find a genuine object, but it turned out to be fake.

It can't be called fake, the jade is real and the carving is quite good, but the age is artificially created. It should be from the last few years, because Zhuang Rui discovered that although there is a faint spiritual energy in these jade figures, the color is very light, and the coloring made with pigments is only attached to the surface of these jade pieces and has not penetrated into them. In other words, the person who made the fake did not color these jade pieces for very long.

Zhuang Rui put down the magnifying glass in his hand, looked up at the person holding the treasure in front of him, and asked, "Sir, could you tell me the origin of this set of jade artifacts?"

The owner of the treasure was around thirty years old, wearing glasses and appearing refined. Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, he quickly replied, "I'm a history teacher at a middle school. I bought this from an antique market two years ago after watching an appraisal program on CCTV..."

"How much did it cost?" Zhuang Rui pressed.

"Hehe, the person who sold me this said it was an ancient jade from the Han Dynasty. It was still covered in dirt when I bought it. It cost me 2,800 yuan. Mr. Zhuang, is this jade fake?"

This history teacher seems to have a good attitude; it appears she was already mentally prepared that the object was fake.

Zhuang Rui smiled and said, "The jade isn't fake, but it's not ancient jade from the Han Dynasty. It's modernly carved and artificially aged. The jade is Hetian white jade, of average quality. However, this set of artificially aged sacrificial jade artifacts has good craftsmanship. You can keep it for yourself to admire. In the future, when you go to the antique market, look more and buy less. If this thing were real, you'd have to add two zeros to the price you paid..."

Zhuang Rui now assumed the role of an expert. Although he had to use his spiritual energy to determine the authenticity of the jade set, it broadened his horizons. He realized that modern carving techniques weren't necessarily inferior to ancient ones, and might even surpass them in some aspects. This jade set, if preserved for hundreds of years, would surely become a set of exquisitely carved ancient jade pieces.

"Thank you, Teacher Zhuang. I will pay attention in the future." The visitor was satisfied with Zhuang Rui's reply, bowed, and then took his belongings and left.

Zhuang Rui and the others all had small microphones on their collars, so everyone below could hear clearly what they said on stage. Their appraisal of the jade artifacts was well-reasoned and supported by evidence, which gave the audience more confidence in the young appraiser. Just as the history teacher stepped off the stage, a stylishly dressed lady walked up.

"Teacher Zhuang, this is a glass-type jadeite bracelet that I bought a few years ago when I was traveling in Myanmar. I heard that the price of jadeite has risen a lot in recent years. Could you tell me how much this bracelet is worth now?"

When Zhuang Rui noticed that the woman who came on stage wasn't carrying anything, he wondered what was going on. Then, the woman took off a bracelet from her wrist and placed it in front of Zhuang Rui.

Zhuang Rui picked up the bracelet and casually said, "Jade has the characteristic of conducting heat. In this kind of weather, if you put jade on your face, you will feel cool. Moreover, natural jade contains a variety of minerals that are essential to the human body. When wearing a bracelet, it is in direct contact with the skin, so the minerals in the jade are easily absorbed by the human body. It can supplement the various minerals needed by the human body and can also effectively promote blood circulation."

However, this jade bracelet of yours is fake. It's made of colored glass. Wearing it won't do any harm, but it won't bring any benefits to your health either..."

While Zhuang Rui was speaking, he had already finished appraising the bracelet. It was made of colored glass that had been injected with chromium oxide and copper oxide, giving it a green appearance.

"Impossible! I bought this for 30,000 yuan, and it even comes with a certificate of authenticity. It's a genuine product, young man. Do you even know what you're talking about?"

When the woman heard Zhuang Rui say that the bracelet was fake, her expression changed drastically, and she immediately turned hostile. She changed her address to Zhuang Rui from "teacher" to "young man," and their conversation caused a stir among the audience.

"I knew it, that guy is too young, he definitely lacks experience..."

"That's right, everyone else has a certificate of authenticity, how could it be fake..."

"Not necessarily. These days, everything can be faked. Can't an authentication certificate be faked?"

Various opinions arose, some supporting the woman and others speaking up for Zhuang Rui, instantly turning the originally quiet venue into a noisy one.

"Xiao Zhuang, what happened?"

The woman's voice startled the other experts who were appraising the artifacts. They all put down their items and looked at Zhuang Rui. Although Zhuang Rui was relatively young, they had come together. If anything went wrong, they would all lose face. This was a matter of shared honor and shared loss.

"I bought a glass-type jadeite bracelet for 30,000 yuan, but he called it fake. No way, I want it appraised by an expert. Also, you need to give me an appraisal certificate, otherwise I can't explain myself."

Before Zhuang Rui could speak, the woman shouted angrily. She wasn't there to cause trouble, but she had bought the bracelet several years ago and rarely wore it. Upon hearing that it was fake, she was both angry and a little frightened, so she raised her voice to cover up her unease.

"That's right, a young man with no experience is unreliable. Replace him!"

"Young people are just no good. Something that others bought for 30,000 yuan is worthless in their eyes..."

However, her words evoked sympathy from the audience, and many people spoke up in support. These people shared a similar plight, fearing that their own items would also be fake when they went on stage.

"Xiao Zhuang, let me see the bracelet..."

Old Sun stood up from the table with the antique appraisal sign, walked to Zhuang Rui's side, and took the bracelet from Zhuang Rui's somewhat dazed hand.

Zhuang Rui was genuinely stunned by the woman's machine-gun-like barrage of words. It wasn't until Old Sun took the bracelet away that he came to his senses and couldn't help but shake his head and smile bitterly. It was age that was to blame. If it were any of the other experts, this woman probably wouldn't have had this attitude. Damn it, he couldn't even speak the truth anymore.

However, Zhuang Rui quickly dismissed this idea, reasoning that if someone is unreasonable, no one will listen to them.

"This bracelet is indeed fake, miss. Although Myanmar produces jade, it doesn't mean that all the jade sold there is genuine. On the contrary, they use the gimmick of producing jade to sell counterfeit goods, and quite a few people in China have been fooled."

"You're all in this together, of course you'll protect your own people. You say it's fake, what evidence do you have?"

After examining the bracelet, Mr. Sun reached the same conclusion as Zhuang Rui. However, it was clear that the lady could not accept Mr. Sun's conclusion and even attacked the experts on the stage.

"You want evidence, right? I can give it to you."

Zhuang Rui suppressed his anger, took the bracelet from Old Sun's hand, and said, "You can come over and take a look with a magnifying glass. Real jade doesn't have air bubbles inside, but look at this bracelet, it's full of air bubbles."

The woman pursed her lips; although she didn't move, a hint of doubt appeared on her face.

Seeing that the woman was still persistent, Zhuang Rui said, "Miss, could you give me two strands of hair?"

What do you need your hair for?

Although the woman didn't quite understand Zhuang Rui's meaning, she still plucked two long strands of hair from her head and handed them to Zhuang Rui.

"Talk is cheap, let's do an experiment..."

Zhuang Rui took off the glass-type jade pendant from his neck and said, "This Guanyin pendant of mine is also made of glass-type jade. I'll do an experiment now, and you'll understand after you see it."

"Does anyone have a lighter?"

As Zhuang Rui spoke, he picked up a hair and wrapped it around the pendant. When he touched his clothes, he found that the long robe didn't even have any pockets, but the lighter for lighting cigarettes was inside his clothes.

"I have..." As the shout rang out, someone ran up from below the stage and handed Zhuang Rui a lighter.

"As I just mentioned, jade conducts heat relatively quickly, so if you wrap your hair around this piece of jade and then burn it, the heat will be quickly transferred away, and the temperature will rise slowly. Therefore, the hair won't burn off in a short time."

Zhuang Rui took the lighter, stood up, raised the jade Guanyin pendant in his left hand, then used the lighter in his right hand to create a flame and lit it on the hair. After four or five seconds, Zhuang Rui put down the lighter and removed the hair that was wrapped around his Guanyin pendant.

"Look everyone, isn't this hair still intact?"

Zhuang Rui straightened the slightly curly hair and showed it to the audience.

"It really didn't break..."

"Hurry up and try the other bracelet..."

Upon seeing this, the people below the stage began to discuss among themselves, while the owner of the bracelet turned pale.

"Okay, let's try this bracelet next."

As Zhuang Rui spoke, he wrapped another strand of hair around the bracelet. Then, using the same action as before, he used a lighter to burn one of the strands of hair wrapped around the bracelet. The owner of the bracelet was closest to Zhuang Rui and could clearly see that the hair was burned and broken off after only two or three seconds when the flame was placed on it.

He put down the bracelet and picked up the hair that had been burned in two. There was no need for Zhuang Rui to say anything more. Everyone in the room could see clearly what was true and false, right and wrong, and who was right and who was wrong.

Chapter 314 Folk Treasure Appraisal (Part 3)

"Miss, if you still have any questions, please take this bracelet to the National Jade and Gemstone Testing Center at No. xx, xx Road, Chaoyang District, Beijing for appraisal. I can have them appraise it for you free of charge..."

Facts speak louder than words. After hearing Zhuang Rui's words, the woman's face showed a mixture of shame and heartache. She was ashamed of her earlier hurtful words, but this young man had proven her wrong with his actions; she was heartache over the 30,000 yuan she had spent on the bracelet. 600.00

"Teacher Zhuang, I'm so sorry, I'm really sorry..." The woman took back the bracelet with embarrassment, bowed to Zhuang Rui, and hurriedly walked off the stage and disappeared into the crowd.

Zhuang Rui stood up and said to everyone who saw this scene, "Friends and fellow collectors, you have come here to participate in this event, naturally hoping that your treasures are genuine."

Although our country has a long history and many fine artifacts have been left behind, they are pitifully few for the current collecting community. It is quite normal to buy fakes and counterfeits in the antique market, and it is not a shameful thing. Even people like us have had the experience of being fooled and paying tuition.

We hope that collectors can maintain a positive attitude and take the appraisal results seriously. Don't doubt our professional knowledge just because the item is fake. We will also use our professional knowledge to help everyone distinguish the authenticity of the items in their hands.

As for antiques that we cannot distinguish between genuine and fake, we will be honest and let collectors have them tested further. Please trust our professional ethics; we will never claim a fake is genuine, nor will we arbitrarily judge a genuine antique as fake. That's all I wanted to say. Thank you!

After Zhuang Rui finished speaking, he bowed deeply to the audience. Everyone below pondered his words. After a minute or so, someone started clapping, and the meeting room erupted in thunderous applause that lasted for a long time.

Most people have this mentality: they can say something is bad about their own things, but they can't stand hearing others say it.

To give an example, it's like a friend constantly complaining that his child is naughty and doesn't know any better. He can say that, but if you agree by saying, "Yes, your son really doesn't know any better," then even if your friend doesn't break off the friendship, he will probably distance himself from you in the future.

The same goes for antiques. Who wouldn't want the antiques they buy to be genuine? But after all, there are hundreds or even millions of times more fake antiques than genuine ones in this world. Naturally, the chance of buying a fake is greater than the chance of finding a treasure. Zhuang Rui's words were a reminder to everyone in the room not to be too obsessed.

While there are certainly speculators among collectors now, they are relatively more rational compared to what will happen in a few years. After hearing Zhuang Rui's words, these people also learned something.

The thunderous applause lasted for more than three minutes before gradually subsiding with the host's intervention. However, the audience looked at Zhuang Rui with admiration in their eyes.

Although the host said that the collectors who stayed behind could not have their items appraised today, none of the people gathered outside left. After all, they could learn a lot just by watching.

Zhuang Rui had no idea that after the program aired, he would also make a name for himself in the domestic antique industry. At least many collectors recognized Zhuang Rui as an expert. Of course, that's a story for another time.

...

After the applause subsided, Liu Jia from Beijing TV, holding the microphone, said, "Distinguished guests and friends, the experts have been appraising your items for two consecutive hours. Please allow them to take a half-hour break before continuing to appraise the treasures in your hands..."

The Shandong TV male host's voice followed: "For those of you waiting in line, you definitely won't be able to participate in the live appraisal today. Tomorrow morning at 8:00 AM, the experts from the Beijing panel will continue the appraisal activity."

After the host finished speaking, staff members came over to lead Zhuang Rui and the others to a nearby lounge. Zhuang Rui was fine, only appraising two or three items, but the others were in a lot of trouble. Fatty Jin was so busy in the air-conditioned conference room that his long shirt was almost soaked with sweat.

"Xiao Zhuang, not bad. You have a solid foundation in basic knowledge and strong adaptability. Even if you go out alone, you can hold your own." After arriving at the lounge, Fatty Jin wiped his sweat and gave Zhuang Rui a thumbs up. They often encountered situations like this, and even if Zhuang Rui didn't come out, there were still solutions.

"Teacher Jin, have you encountered this situation before?"

"Hey, these kinds of things happen all the time, but they're mostly caused by human factors. In our circle, there are also some people who will cheat and falsify things for a few bucks..."

After hearing Jin Pangzi's explanation, Zhuang Rui finally understood. It turned out that with the rise of the collecting craze, the appraisal industry had also flourished, and as a result, various private cultural relic appraisal institutions sprang up like mushrooms after rain.

These organizations and individuals operating under the banners of "XX Committee" or "XX Association" include old pedants whose "theory cannot be applied to practice," antique experts whose "practice has no theoretical basis," and many more who are "yes-men" who will issue certificates as long as you pay them.

Just as West Pacific University has tarnished the reputation of many legitimate American universities, the various certificates in the antique industry have made the already notorious antique market even more dazzling and confusing. "What is fake is not necessarily fake, and what is real is not necessarily genuine." It is these various appraisal institutions that have stirred up this mess.

Fatty Jin took a sip of water and said with a smile, "What needs to be appraised most right now is not the antiques in the hands of ordinary people, but the 'experts' who issue certificates for these antiques. We are all in the ranks of those fighting counterfeits..."

Zhuang Rui was stunned by what Fatty Jin said. According to this logic, should experts who appraise antiques also issue certificates that "prove that this expert is genuine"?

However, after Jin Pangzi said that, Zhuang Rui's resentment lessened considerably. The appraisal market is a mixed bag, so it's no wonder that collectors distrust it.

Actually, Zhuang Rui's hair-burning performance just now was a bit tricky. If you wrap a strand of hair around the glass and wrap it a little tightly, it won't burn through in a second or two. Some merchants use this trick to deceive consumers. However, if you burn it for a little longer, you can still tell the difference between real and fake. So, using this method to identify the authenticity of jade is still feasible.

"Xiao Zhuang, you learned from Brother Ma in Zhonghai, so you should be familiar with porcelain, right? Could you take a look at the items I have here later? There are just too many things today, I'm a bit overwhelmed..."

Researcher Tian Fan from the Palace Museum was also quite tired. He rested on the sofa for a while before recovering. Today, apart from calligraphy and paintings, there were many antique ceramics on display. Of course, most of them could only be called modern handicrafts. Tian Fan had just looked at twenty or thirty pieces of porcelain. Only one vase from the Daoguang period was genuine, but it was somewhat damaged and its market price was greatly reduced.

Zhong Haide is very famous for his porcelain restoration in China, and he also has his own unique insights into the appreciation of ceramics. That's why Tian Fan asked Zhuang Rui to help him look at some items. Obviously, Zhuang Rui won the real recognition of these experts with his actions.

The half-hour break was very short, basically just enough time to drink some water and chat for a few minutes before a staff member came out to urge them to come back on stage. Although the experts were not introduced again this time, Zhuang Rui received a long and enthusiastic round of applause when he appeared.

Zhuang Rui, who was originally the most idle on stage, became the busiest person after the second round of appraisal began. He wondered where all the people who possessed jade artifacts had been hiding. Now they were all showing up, with all kinds of exquisite jade artifacts, including many fine pieces.

A white jade thumb ring from the Qing Dynasty is quite expensive. Originally, this item was a tool used to draw the bowstring when shooting an arrow. It was a special device worn on the archer's right thumb to protect it from being injured by the bowstring. Later, however, it came to be seen as a symbol of status.

Although the spiritual energy inside this thumb ring is white, it is very dense, and the jade is also of the highest quality white jade. After Zhuang Rui identified it as genuine, General Manager Qian also gave it a price of 300,000 RMB based on the market trend of similar antiques.

Seeing that the item had been identified as genuine and of considerable value, the crowd below the stage was in an uproar, which made Zhuang Rui even busier. However, when it comes to antiques, as long as you know beforehand whether it is real or fake, you can always come up with some reasoning.

Zhuang Rui first used spiritual energy to distinguish between genuine and fake items. If the items were rich in spiritual energy, he would hand them over to Boss Qian for appraisal and certification. If the items were lacking in spiritual energy, he would directly point out some flaws to the owner, who would then accept the explanation. In comparison, although Zhuang Rui's group had the most people around, he was the fastest at appraising treasures.

As time went by, the folk treasure appraisal event this afternoon gradually came to an end. However, the host did not announce the end of the event, and no one left. Instead, more and more people gathered.

Suddenly, Tian Fan, who was appraising ceramics, spoke up: "Gentlemen, put down what you're holding and take a look at this."

Although everyone has their own area of expertise, these experts still have some knowledge of antiques outside their own field and can offer each other some advice. Since Tian Fan asked for his advice, it was clear that this thing was interesting. Zhuang Rui and the others put down what they were doing and looked at him.

#### Chapter 315 Folk Treasure Appraisal (Part 4)

As previously mentioned, Tang Sancai (Tang tri-color glazed pottery) is a type of pottery popular during the Tang Dynasty. It features yellow, white, and green as its basic glaze colors, and this type of pottery is commonly referred to as "Tang Sancai."

The Tang Dynasty was the golden age of Chinese feudal society, a period of economic prosperity and flourishing culture and art. Tang Sancai (Tang tri-color pottery) is a type of painted pottery craft that emerged during this period, known for its vivid and lifelike shapes, bright colors, and rich sense of life.

The Tang tri-color pottery figure now placed in front of Professor Tian Fan is a tri-color Bactrian camel figurine, nearly one meter tall, with a pack bag decorated with animal face patterns hanging on it, and silk and a water bottle also in place. It stretches its neck and opens its mouth, stands upright on its hind legs, and slightly bends its front legs, as if it has just straightened up from a lying position, looking up at the sky and neighing, ready to embark on its journey back to the west. The figure is extremely majestic and magnificent.

As Zhuang Rui gazed intently at the camel with its head held high and neighing, he seemed to see, in a daze, the bustling East and West Markets of Chang'an, with smiling Hu women in the wine alleys beside him, as if he were in the atmosphere of the Tang Dynasty's golden age, experiencing the legends of foreign lands and the East.

Jin Pangzi, Sun Lao, and others were also stunned by this Tang tri-color camel. This tri-color work not only had bright colors and a bright glaze, but also had an exquisite and accurate shape. More importantly, there were many tiny cracks on the glossy glaze of the tri-color camel, like small cracks.

This type of crazing is mainly caused by the uneven shrinkage ratio of the body and the glaze. The body shrinks less while the glaze shrinks more. During the firing process, the glaze shrinks during cooling, thus forming cracks on the surface of the glaze.

As more Tang tri-color glazes were unearthed, this crackled glaze became a very prominent feature for identifying Tang tri-color glazes. Of course, skilled forgers in later generations would certainly have tampered with this feature as well.

"Teacher Sun, what do you think of this object?"

Tian Fan knew that among the people present, Old Sun was a collector of miscellaneous items and was quite familiar with Tang tri-colored pottery. As for Fatty Jin and the others, they probably didn't know much about it. So, after everyone had taken a quick look around, Tian Fan asked Old Sun a question.

Old Sun took a 20x magnifying glass and examined the crackle pattern carefully for a while. He shook his head and said, "I'm not sure about this object. Judging from the crackle pattern, it's made of sesame seeds, not something that was later coated with potassium permanganate solution. But this object is too perfect; I'm not sure..."

The sesame-like cracks that Mr. Sun mentioned refer to the natural cracks that form on Tang Sancai pottery after it is eroded by groundwater and acidic and alkaline substances in the soil. These cracks are quite fine and resemble sesame seeds, and can be clearly observed from about a foot away.

Counterfeiters often use chemicals such as hydrofluoric acid and potassium permanganate to corrode and stain the glaze of the object. After leaving it for a period of time, the "crazing" of the glaze will become obvious, but the cracks will be wide and not as fine as natural crazing.

This sancai camel is undoubtedly an authentic piece, judging from its glaze, shape, and crackle pattern. However, it is so perfect that it surpasses even the sancai camel in the Palace Museum's collection. Therefore, neither Professor Tian Fan nor Mr. Sun dared to draw any conclusions.

"Teacher Tian, I once attended one of your classes on the characteristics and identification of Tang tri-color ware. After seeing this piece, I bought it and had it examined by several people, all of whom said it was genuine. Today, I would like to take this opportunity to ask you to help me identify it."

The owner of this Tang tri-colored camel was a middle-aged man in his forties, slightly overweight, with a square face. Even in front of the experts, he remained neither arrogant nor humble, suggesting that he was a person of some status.

"Mr. Liu is a member of our Jinan Collectors Association and the chairman of Tianx Food Co., Ltd. He is very passionate about collecting and has been a guest on our 'Collecting World' program before..."

The male host from Shandong TV, seizing the opportunity, introduced the owner of the treasure to Zhuang Rui and the others, indirectly indicating that the person had the financial means to collect such valuable antiques.

"Mr. Liu, since you are an expert in this field, may I ask how you acquired this Tang tri-color camel?"

The work of appraising antiques not only requires examining the artifacts themselves, but also tracing their provenance. Some precious artifacts are unearthed from ancient tombs, and even stolen antiques will have their stolen items and quantities circulating.

Mr. Liu seemed unconcerned about discussing the item's provenance, saying frankly, "Hehe, I saw this tricolor camel at a friend's private gathering. I liked it at the time, so I bought it..."

"A gathering?" Zhuang Rui muttered to himself. It must be an exchange activity organized by some collectors.

"It's the black market."

General Manager Qian, sitting next to Zhuang Rui, covered the microphone with his hand and spoke softly.

Zhuang Rui was stunned for a moment when he heard this, because he suddenly thought of the tricolor horse he had seen in the black market on the grassland. It was also a nearly flawless imitation, which was bought by that foolish Japanese man at a high price. This tricolor camel with such perfect glaze, could it also be a fake?

Once this thought arose in Zhuang Rui's mind, it was like a shadow that wouldn't go away. He had no choice but to use his spiritual energy to check it again. While the others were talking, Zhuang Rui walked to the table with the three-colored camel and looked down at it.

"Mr. Liu, how much did you spend to find this item?"

Sitting next to Professor Tian, Fatty Jin pressed on, asking a crucial question during the appraisal process, especially regarding such a perfect sancai (three-color glazed pottery) piece, as the seller would never set the price too low.

"I feel that 400,000 RMB is worth it."

Seeing that even several experts were unsure of the authenticity of his collection, Chairman Liu felt a surge of pride.

Logically speaking, the price he paid for this Tang tri-color pottery piece was almost the same as that of tri-color pottery antiques auctioned off in regular domestic auction houses.

Some readers might be thinking, "Tang Sancai is a national treasure, how can it be so cheap?" Actually, these readers are mistaken. Tang Sancai first gained recognition overseas, and its price peaked in the 1980s. In December 1989, a Tang Sancai pottery horse offered by Sotheby's London set a record for the highest price ever paid for a Chinese artwork at auction, fetching HK\$49.55 million, a record that stood for 12 years, making it incredibly popular.

However, due to the severe impact of counterfeit products on the market, many people were deceived, and their confidence in Tang Sancai (Tang tri-color pottery) waned, causing the price of Tang Sancai in the international market to plummet.

In recent years, the prices of Tang tri-color pottery works auctioned on the international market have mostly been around several hundred thousand US dollars, while the prices in China are even lower. Even some exquisite pieces are priced between several hundred thousand and one million RMB.

Therefore, if this Tang tri-colored camel is genuine, Mr. Liu still made a profit on this deal.

"Brother Jin, Brother Sun, I think this item is genuine. It was probably stolen from a Tang Dynasty tomb. What do you think?"

After thinking for a while, Professor Tian shared his insights. In recent years, tomb raiding was rampant, and it was hard to guarantee that some exquisite artifacts would be lost. The owner of the treasure in front of him also stated that the item came from the black market. All signs indicated that this tricolor camel was highly likely to be genuine.

"It's fake! This Tang Dynasty tri-colored camel is a modern replica!"

Before Jin Pangzi and the others could answer, Zhuang Rui, who had been silent all along, suddenly raised his head from the table and said decisively.

"Oh? How do you know?" Professor Tian knew that Zhuang Rui must have seen through something when he spoke so confidently.

Teacher Zhuang, if you say it's fake, you should at least have some evidence, right? I don't care about the hundreds of thousands of yuan. If it's really fake, I'll just consider it a lesson learned. But please point out where it's fake."

Although Chairman Liu wasn't as aggressive as that woman, his words were still witty and pointed: "Since you say it's fake, then show me the evidence."

Zhuang Rui frowned upon hearing this. The reason he said it was fake was because there was no spiritual energy inside this tricolor camel. Zhuang Rui had seen thousands of antiques, and they all contained some spiritual energy.

Therefore, Zhuang Rui was certain that this tri-colored camel was a fake, but based on his understanding of Tang tri-colored pottery, he couldn't come up with any reason why it was fake.

"Well, there's a reason for that..."

Zhuang Rui circled the tricolor camel again, using his spiritual energy to examine it from head to tail, trying to find something different. Suddenly, his eyes widened, and for a moment, an incredulous expression appeared on his face. However, because Zhuang Rui's head was always lowered, no one saw it.

"Damn it, they can actually mass-produce something like this?!"

Zhuang Rui was so shocked because when he saw the tricolor camel's bent and raised foreleg, he was surprised to find that there was a character "Xu" on the inner wall of the foreleg, exactly the same as the one he had seen in the black market on the grassland.

Zhuang Rui now admires this forger to the point of prostration. Not only did he create a tricolor horse, but now he has created a tricolor camel. You know, even fakes have different grades and levels.

This tricolor camel is likely made using techniques and soil that followed the Tang Dynasty's tricolor firing process. Even carbon-14 dating might not be able to detect it. Such a perfect imitation should cost over 100,000 yuan. The creator of this tricolor camel is definitely a master in the forgery industry.

Chapter 316 Folk Treasure Appraisal (Part 5)

"Xiao Zhuang, come here for a moment..." Old Sun stood at the doorway between the appraisal table and the rest room, beckoning to Zhuang Rui.

Zhuang Rui had already circled the Tang tri-colored camel several times, but hadn't pointed out the problem. People on and off the stage were getting impatient. Although Zhuang Rui had performed well before, he couldn't just spout nonsense like that.

Seeing Zhuang Rui's furrowed brows, Liu Jia, who had originally intended to smooth things over, quickly stepped forward after seeing Teacher Sun address Zhuang Rui, saying, "Fellow collectors, please give the experts some time to evaluate this Tang tri-color pottery piece. Whether it is genuine or not, the following will be even more exciting."

Upon hearing the host's words, Fatty Jin and the others simply stood up, left the table, and went into the lounge inside.

"Teacher Sun, what's the matter?"

Zhuang Rui was now worried about how to explain why this Tang tri-colored camel was fake. Based on his knowledge of Tang tri-colored pottery, he really couldn't find any fault with it unless he used his spiritual energy to examine it. Now, although he knew that there was something else going on with this tri-colored camel, he couldn't just smash it, because that would make it even more inexplicable.

"I'm not very optimistic about this Tang tri-color pottery either, because it's too perfect. Among unearthed cultural relics, it's rare to see such a bright and flawless piece. But if we can't find any faults, we can't presume to say whether it's real or fake. What you just said was a bit presumptuous."

Given his relationship with Uncle De, Old Sun was considered Zhuang Rui's elder, so he criticized Zhuang Rui's actions earlier. However, his opinion on the antique also represented the thoughts of Professor Tian and others, who all nodded in agreement.

"Teacher Sun is right. I also auctioned a Tang tri-color female figure last year. That piece was relatively well preserved, but the glaze on the waist was still somewhat damaged. This tri-color camel is the first one I have ever seen."

General Manager Qian also shared his opinion. For people like him, having seen countless antiques, at their level, when they see an object, they often have an intuitive feeling. Like this tricolor camel, although he couldn't find any fault with it, something just felt off.

Of course, this is not absolute. If they had the opportunity to obtain this tricolor camel, they would most likely buy it as long as the price wasn't too outrageous, because at least on the surface, they couldn't find any trace of forgery. This is actually the root cause of why even experts can be fooled and pay tuition fees; sometimes they are too confident in their professional knowledge.

"Xiao Zhuang, I think we should do this: when we go out later, you apologize and say you misjudged him. Nobody's perfect, and I'm sure the other party won't say much. We can issue him an appraisal certificate, and I'll write it."

Professor Tian's words seemed to make Zhuang Rui admit that he had misjudged the item, but by having Zhuang Rui sign the authentication certificate, he was essentially taking on the risk. If it were later revealed that the antique was fake, it would be Professor Tian who would lose face.

"Hmm, Teacher Tian is right. Xiao Zhuang, let's do it this way. I'm starving and just want to go eat."

Jin Pangzi and others echoed Professor Tian's opinion. It's easy to say whether something is true or false; you can just say it with your lips. But if you don't explain it logically, others won't be convinced. Moreover, this person who holds the treasure is considered an expert in the field. If this drags on, it will only lower the authority of the expert team in the eyes of the public.

"Teachers, why don't you ask me why I said this object is fake?"

Zhuang Rui smiled wryly. While everyone was trying to persuade him, he was racking his brains for an explanation, and he actually came up with one.

"Oh? You actually spotted a problem?" Professor Tian was somewhat surprised. This tricolor camel was impeccable in terms of shape, glaze, and crackle pattern. He was confident he couldn't find any fault with it, yet Zhuang Rui actually had a basis for his findings.

"I didn't see anything wrong with it, but I had a friend outside the circle who once spent more than 300,000 yuan to buy a Tang tri-color horse on a black market in the south. He had it appraised by many experts and it was confirmed to be genuine. I have seen it before, and in terms of glaze and shape, it is no less than this piece today."

But just last month, he accidentally broke the tricolor horse. While cleaning up the broken pieces, he discovered something strange: on the inside of a shard of porcelain, he found a simplified Chinese character. What that means, I don't need to explain, right?

Zhuang Rui's so-called friends were obviously fictitious. The fake tricolor horse was bought by the Japanese and is probably now treasured and kept at home. It's impossible for it to be broken.

In fact, Zhuang Rui's words did not stand up to scrutiny, because no one would easily break an item that cost hundreds of thousands of yuan. However, such things have happened before. So, as soon as Zhuang Rui finished speaking, the other experts looked at each other in surprise. They did not expect that Zhuang Rui would use this as a basis to judge the authenticity of this tricolor camel.

"Xiao Zhuang, we can't ask them to break the item for appraisal, can we?"

"Yes, quite a few Tang tri-color pottery pieces have survived to this day, so it's possible that this one is genuine."

Several people disagreed with Zhuang Rui's statement. Although they were all antique appraisal experts with good professional ethics, they would not risk breaking a seemingly real object to determine its authenticity. This method was a bit too crazy. If it was real, who would be responsible for the damage to the antique?

"What Xiao Zhuang said is true. Some skilled forgers like to leave something on porcelain or other objects. But Xiao Zhuang, can you be sure that there is a name left on this Tang tri-color camel?"

Professor Tian pondered for a long time, but he was not optimistic about Zhuang Rui's suggestion. The most crucial point was that if the object was damaged and the problem could not be found, who would bear the responsibility? You know, four or five hundred thousand RMB is a considerable sum for these experts, even though they can afford it.

While the group was discussing, Liu Jia, the host who had been listening for a while, suddenly spoke up, "May I interrupt for a moment?"

"Do the experts mean that only by breaking this tricolor pottery can a conclusion be reached about its authenticity?"

Liu Jia didn't know much about the antique business, but she understood what the others meant by speaking so frankly, and she asked the question with great excitement.

"This... is Xiao Zhuang's idea, but it's not very feasible, because if this thing is real, then we'll have to compensate someone else, and that's not a small amount..." Although Professor Tian didn't understand why the female host was so excited, he still explained it to her.

"So that means if someone pays the fee, they can break this Tang tri-color pottery on the spot for authentication, right?"

Professor Tian was confused by Liu Jia's words. He nodded subconsciously, then quickly shook his head and said, "We must ask the owner of the antique for his opinion. If he doesn't agree, then whatever we say will be in vain."

If someone is willing to bear the consequences of breaking the Tang tri-color pottery, the experts wouldn't mind using this method, because they don't want to draw any conclusions about the piece. If it's real, that's fine, but if it's fake, so many people can't find any fault with it, and it would be a very embarrassing thing if word got out later.

"Okay, I'll go talk to the owner of the treasure and then see if the TV station can cover the cost. Please wait a moment."

Liu Jia seemed to have taken the wrong medicine; after speaking, she turned and walked out, swaying her slender waist, leaving a room full of experts looking at each other in bewilderment. Why was this host so interested in breaking Tang Sancai pottery? Girls don't usually play those mud-throwing games when they're little, do they?

On the other hand, smashing something on a TV recording set takes a lot of courage. If you break something and can't find any clues or faults, then the person who smashed the item has completely lost their wisdom.

Thinking about this, the experts couldn't help but complain to Zhuang Rui. This young man was good in every way, but he was just a bit too serious. There are plenty of things in the world that are hard to distinguish between real and fake, so one more won't make a difference.

Liu Chuan was completely unaware that several experts were secretly criticizing her and Zhuang Rui. Right now, she was excited. How could she make a program that would attract viewers' attention? The answer was news, news with something to watch.

Today's treasure appraisal, while having a few minor highlights, was generally uneventful. If we could have staged a scene where experts smashed the treasure on the spot, revealing the true and false three colors, regardless of who won or lost, this episode of the treasure appraisal program would definitely have been a highlight.

Liu Jia excitedly found the owner of the treasure, Mr. Liu, and told him about it. For some reason, Mr. Liu actually agreed. However, if they smashed his Tang tri-colored pottery and still couldn't find any flaws, the compensation would not be 400,000, but 800,000.

However, when Liu Jia reported this matter to Deputy Director Zhu, she was met with a setback. Deputy Director Zhu praised her idea, but refused to offer the 800,000 yuan outright, because he did not have a high opinion of Zhuang Rui. He was so young, and even Professor Tian, a professional ceramic appraiser, was not sure about something. What kind of trouble could he possibly cause?

"Mr. Zhuang, gentlemen, the station's budget is also quite tight. In my opinion, we should just let this matter drop..."

Deputy Director Zhu gave Liu Jia and the other experts face and personally came to the lounge to explain.

"If the item is genuine, I'll pay for it, but I have one condition..."

Zhuang Rui suddenly interrupted Deputy Director Zhu, drawing everyone's attention to him. They wondered what kind of conditions this somewhat impulsive young man would propose.

#### Chapter 317 Folk Treasure Appraisal (Part 6)

Zhuang Rui's words silenced the lounge. In the experts' minds, they were just there for a cameo role; there was no need to be so serious. It seems these young people are just too young; they won't grow without experiencing some setbacks.

Don't tell me you're just guessing this tricolor camel is fake. Even if it really is fake, what if the forger didn't leave any notes inside? You still won't be able to find any fault with it. Besides, even if you prove it's fake, you won't get a penny. On the contrary, if you can't prove it, you'll have to pay out hundreds of thousands. It seems like no normal person would do that kind of deal.

Leaving aside the experts, the way Deputy Director Zhu is looking at Zhuang Rui now is like he's looking at a giant panda. He's probably thinking that rich people have a lot of weird quirks, spending hundreds of thousands of yuan to smash porcelain to hear the sound. It's just a waste of time.

"Xiao Zhuang, you really need to think this through. You're still young, it's normal to mistake something for something else occasionally, and you'll forget about it after a while. Nobody remembers this kind of thing..."

Old Sun, confident in his good relationship with Uncle De, offered a few words of advice to Zhuang Rui. He believed that Zhuang Rui had simply spoken too much earlier and was now losing face, so he insisted on determining the authenticity of the tricolor camel.

In the antique circle, it's quite common for things to escalate to the point of no return in a heated exchange. Some old friends often have conflicts due to differing opinions, but this matter hasn't reached that point yet. If Zhuang Rui just takes a step back and softens his stance, it will be fine.

Not only Old Sun, but also Fatty Jin and Professor Tian, among others, believed that Zhuang Rui was acting out of this mentality. Young people who can't back down are bound to do some impetuous things, which is understandable.

While Zhuang Rui was certainly motivated by a sense of pride, his primary motivation was to prevent this fake antique from becoming a genuine item in their hands. If they hadn't seen it, they wouldn't have bothered, but since they had encountered it, he couldn't simply ignore it.

As for losing money, that's simply impossible. On the inner wall of the raised camel's foreleg, there's a simplified "许" character, about the size of a thumb, clearly written. As long as you let your foot touch the ground first when you break this object, the truth will naturally be revealed.

"By the way, Professor Zhuang, you haven't stated your conditions yet."

Of all the people in the room, Liu Jia was probably the only one who didn't care about Zhuang Rui's motives for insisting on determining the authenticity of the item. What she cared about was how to increase the show's ratings and how to attract viewers' attention.

It's worth noting that Liu Jia was responsible for both planning and hosting this episode. If the show becomes a hit, she might have a chance to transfer to CCTV. While Beijing TV is decent, its influence is nowhere near that of CCTV.

Zhuang Rui smiled and said, "Since your station is unwilling to bear the consequences of smashing the treasure for appraisal, then my condition is that although this appraisal can be held on-site, it cannot be recorded, and of course, it cannot be broadcast. Consider this an exchange within our industry."

After Zhuang Rui finished speaking, Deputy Director Zhu's face instantly turned extremely ugly. In his view, Zhuang Rui's words were tantamount to slapping him in the face. You were unwilling to pay? Then I'll pay for it myself. But I'm sorry, you've also lost your right to record the broadcast.

"Professor Zhuang, such a wonderful live treasure appraisal, if broadcast, would not only benefit us, but it would also make you remembered by audiences all over the country. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

It's said that those involved are often blinded, while bystanders see things clearly. Liu Jia was only focused on her TV program, but she didn't consider that if Zhuang Rui smashed the item for appraisal and it turned out to be fake, it would indeed benefit Zhuang Rui's reputation. But what if the item was genuine and there were no flaws? Wouldn't that make her lose face in front of the entire nation?

This is because people are in different positions and have different perspectives. Deputy Director Zhu felt that Zhuang Rui was trying to embarrass him, while the host Liu was tempting Zhuang Rui with fame and fortune. Jin Pangzi and the others thought that Zhuang Rui was unsure of himself, so he left himself a way out. Even if the item was real, he would only lose 800,000 yuan at most, and he wouldn't lose face in front of the national television audience.

In truth, Zhuang Rui hadn't considered all these complexities. Although he had decided to reveal the true nature of the tricolor camel to everyone, he also felt that smashing the treasure for appraisal was somewhat unreliable and would draw too much attention.

Zhuang Rui, who is usually quite low-key, was forced to participate in this folk treasure appraisal event by Grandpa Gu. The previous issues he had resolved had already been recognized by the experts in the field, so there was no need to show off anymore. That's why he made this request, which was different from what everyone else thought. However, if the experts present knew his idea, they would definitely spit in his face. They were about to smash the treasure for appraisal, and he still said he didn't want to show off.

Seeing Zhuang Rui's firm attitude, Liu Jia looked at her superior, Deputy Director Zhu. Although he was very unhappy with Zhuang Rui, he wanted to take this opportunity to make amends for what he had already offended. So he smiled and said, "Let's do as Teacher Zhuang says. Discuss it with the owner of the treasure; consider it a private exchange between them. By the way, Xiao Liu, have someone draft an agreement to clarify things. This will be better for everyone."

Otherwise, how could Deputy Director Zhu, who is about the same age as the driver, become a leader? This leader has a different perspective on issues. Deputy Director Zhu's first thought was to clarify responsibilities to avoid disputes later.

"Okay, Xiao Qiao is studying law, let him draft an agreement. The audience outside has been waiting for quite a while, let's go out."

Although Liu Jia was a little unwilling to accept the failure to secure the right to record the broadcast, the person involved disagreed and the leader did not support it, so the work could not be carried out. She could only go along with Zhuang Rui's wishes and define the matter as an exchange between private collectors.

"Dear viewers and friends, a very interesting situation has arisen. Professor Zhuang suspects this tricolor camel is a fake, while the owner, Mr. Liu, insists his item is genuine. How can we distinguish between the real and the fake? Professor Zhuang has suggested that we break this tricolor camel, and then Professor Zhuang will point out the evidence of its forgery..."

"What? You smashed the tricolor camel? That's ridiculous!"

"Exactly, if something worth hundreds of thousands is broken, who will compensate for it?"

"Isn't that obvious? Whoever broke it should pay for it. Shut up, or the show will be over..."

"Yes, yes, brother is right, this kind of excitement is a rare sight. Everyone stop arguing, let's hear what the host has to say..."

Before Liu Jia could finish speaking, a noisy discussion broke out from below the stage. No one expected that the experts would propose such a radical method after their discussion. If this thing were real, there would be no way to compensate for the damage. However, no one objected. After all, there was a free show to watch, so why not?

"Please be quiet. This matter has been agreed upon by both Teacher Zhuang and the owner of the treasure. They will sign an agreement. If the tricolor camel is found to be fake after authentication, Mr. Liu, the owner of the treasure, will not pursue the responsibility for the item being broken. If Teacher Zhuang cannot provide evidence to prove that it is a fake antique, then Teacher Zhuang will compensate Mr. Liu 800,000 RMB."

This can be seen as a declaration of war against the forgery of antiques. Regardless of whether this sancai camel is real or fake, the actions of Mr. Zhuang and Mr. Liu, the owner of the treasure, deserve our respect and emulation...

Liu Jia's words were very persuasive, and some people in the audience were already applauding and cheering. But those were mostly young people in their early twenties. The more mature and prudent people were secretly thinking to themselves: "Using your own money to fight counterfeits is just a waste of time and a crazy idea!"

While Liu Jia was speaking on stage, Xiao Qiao from the production crew had already drafted an agreement. The agreement was very simple and straightforward: if the item was fake, then everyone would part ways and no one would be in trouble; but if the item was real, then sorry, Mr. Zhuang, you would have to pay 800,000 yuan to hear the sound of the porcelain falling to the ground.

Furthermore, the agreement stipulated that if the tricolor camel was genuine, after Zhuang Rui paid compensation, the broken pottery shards would still belong to Mr. Liu, the owner of the treasure. Regardless of winning or losing, it would mean that Zhuang Rui would gain nothing, not even a single piece of broken porcelain. At this point, some people in the audience were already whispering that Zhuang Rui had lost his mind.

There wasn't time to find a computer to print it out on the spot, so they simply wrote two copies by hand. Zhuang Rui and the owner of the treasure, Mr. Liu, both signed their names on the agreement. Zhuang Rui then took out his checkbook from his clothes and wrote a cash check for 800,000 yuan on the spot, which he handed to Liu Jia for safekeeping. His action was meant to make people think that he was also unsure of the outcome.

Seeing that both parties had finished signing and that the young teacher Zhuang had already taken out 800,000 yuan, everyone in the audience held their breath and pricked up their ears, waiting for Zhuang Rui to smash the tricolor camel. That sound was very valuable; perhaps with one smash, 800,000 yuan would become someone else's.

"Teacher Zhuang, the hammer has arrived, here you go..."

Such a large object is inconvenient to smash. The male host from Shandong TV went to the hotel to borrow a hammer. During that time, he mentioned the bet between the two, which attracted a large group of hotel guests who followed to watch the commotion, making the area inside and outside the conference room completely crowded.

Zhuang Rui shook his head, refusing to take the hammer, and said with a smile, "No need for the hammer, let's do a freefall instead."

His words drew laughter from the audience, but little did they know that if Zhuang Rui were to use a hammer, he would be in a difficult position. Was he supposed to just hit the camel's leg? Even a fool could see the problem. Lifting it up and slamming it to the ground, as long as the force was controlled, it wouldn't be difficult to make the feet land first.

Zhuang Rui looked around, called a few security guards, and had them lift up the thick red carpet covering the ground to reveal the marble floor. They then used the red carpet to form a circle about two or three square meters in size to prevent broken pottery shards from flying everywhere.

Once everything was ready, Zhuang Rui walked to the table, hugged the Tang tri-colored camel statue, placed it outside the circle formed by the carpet, lifted it high with both hands, and forcefully slammed it to the ground.

"Bang, crack..."

The huge conference room was completely silent, except for a crisp sound that echoed throughout the room after the initial silence. It was because Liu Jia had just slipped a miniature microphone under the carpet, which made the sound of Tang Sancai (a type of pottery) hitting the ground resonate throughout the entire conference room.

"Hurry up and take a look, see if it's real or fake!" This is what people at the treasure appraisal event shouted.

"This was so much fun! This treasure appraisal event is great. We should suggest that the city organize one too." These words came from a hotel guest.

The moment the Tang tri-colored pottery landed, everyone in the conference room was ignited with enthusiasm. If it weren't for the armed police maintaining order, they probably would have rushed onto the stage to see what it was all about, even though they couldn't understand it either.

"Alright, put the carpet down."

If we're talking about the calmest person on the scene, it has to be Zhuang Rui. From the moment this Tang tri-colored pottery piece hit the ground, the final outcome was already destined, because Zhuang Rui had already seen that the raised foreleg was already broken.

"Teacher Tian, please come and help take a look. Mr. Liu, please take a look too..."

Zhuang Rui squatted down and pretended to pick up a piece of broken pottery to examine it, but deliberately stayed away from the piece with words on the foot. The limelight had already been drawn, so let others announce the final result.

"Xiao Zhuang, look at this. The texture is fine and smooth, and the color is slightly yellow. It must be a genuine artifact. Alas, it's a pity that this thing has been broken. The world will be missing one of these artifacts."

Like porcelain, pottery has a glazed exterior and a clay interior. Professor Tian picked up a shard of pottery, and as he looked at it, a look of regret appeared on his face. As a researcher, seeing such a delicate object destroyed naturally broke his heart.

The craftsmanship of this forgery is truly unparalleled; even the inner material of the tire is imitated to be identical to the real thing, which is truly admirable.

"This...this is impossible, it can't be!"

Just as Professor Tian finished speaking, a gasp came from Mr. Liu, the owner of the treasure, drawing everyone's attention.

"Is this the character '许'?"

With great difficulty, Mr. Liu read the words on the semi-circular fragment of pottery in his hand. The blue characters flashed in his eyes like lasers. Although Mr. Liu was a self-taught collector, he still knew how to write the traditional Chinese character "许" (Xu). The character in front of him made his heart feel as if it had fallen into an abyss.

"What happened? What's going on on stage?"

The few words that Boss Liu was muttering were amplified wirelessly by the miniature microphone on his collar, and the crowd below, not knowing what was going on, started to discuss it among themselves.

## Chapter 318 Folk Treasure Appraisal (Part 7)

From the legendary invention of characters by Cangjie, Chinese characters have undergone thousands of years of evolution and development, from oracle bone script, bronze script, seal script, clerical script, regular script, running script to modern simplified characters, forming a unique pictographic writing system in the world, a crystallization of countless efforts and wisdom of our ancestors.

In each dynasty, there was basically an official script. Among the scripts mentioned above, clerical script, regular script, and running script were the most widely used after the Han Dynasty and all had extremely strict writing standards. However, in folk usage, some simplified characters that were easier to write were also used, which were called vernacular characters.

However, the character “许” was not among these simplified characters. It was not until 1956, when the State Council passed the “Simplified Chinese Character Scheme” and the “Resolution on Promulgating the Simplified Chinese Character Scheme”, that the simplified Chinese character scheme was officially implemented. In 1959, when the fourth batch of simplified characters and simplified radicals were implemented, the current form of the character “许” came into being.

Therefore, the character "Xu" on the broken pottery shard held by Mr. Liu can definitively determine the nature of this Tang tri-color double-humped camel vessel. Its existence must have occurred after the liberation, which is an indisputable fact that does not need further discussion.

Mr. Liu's heart was filled with mixed emotions, a mix of sweet, sour, bitter, spicy, and salty. He was first and foremost a businessman, and only then could he be considered a collector. As a businessman, he was driven by profit. He agreed to smash the tricolor camel for appraisal with the intention of making a profit. After all, buying it for 400,000 and reselling it for 800,000 would already be a 100% profit. But who knew that not only would his 400,000 go down the drain, but he would also lose face in front of a national audience.

"Xiao Zhuang was right! Amazing, amazing..."

"It really is a fake. The person who made this forgery is a real master..."

"Yes, to be able to fire the glaze and the body of the porcelain to be exactly the same as the real thing, one must be a master in the forgery industry..."

At this moment, Professor Tian and the others gathered around Boss Liu. Under the bright lights of the conference room, they could clearly see the character "许" (Xu), about the size of a thumb. They immediately began to discuss it, undoubtedly tinged with embarrassment at their inability to determine the item's authenticity.

At that moment, a member of the TV crew squeezed into the middle of the group with a camera, pointing it at the broken pottery shard in Mr. Liu's hand. Instantly, a blue "Xu" character appeared on the large screen in the conference room, making it clear to everyone present.

"Why is there another character inside?" This is what someone who is slow to react would say.

"Can a single character prove whether something is true or false?" The person who said this probably doesn't even know what traditional Chinese characters are.

"The character '许' in the Tang Dynasty wasn't written like that, which means this Tang tri-color camel is a modern imitation..." Fortunately, there was someone knowledgeable who explained it to the two people above.

"Teacher Zhuang is really amazing! He actually managed to see the words inside." And you know what? His guess was the most accurate.

"You're talking nonsense. This is based on experience. If you could read through objects, why would you need to appraise antiques? You could just go to a casino in Macau and get rich!"

This person's words represented the public sentiment, and for a moment, the audience became noisy. Seeing such a wonderful on-site appraisal, everyone was as excited as if they had been injected with chicken blood, and they expressed their opinions enthusiastically.

"Miss Liu, didn't I say that filming was not allowed?"

Zhuang Rui looked at the camera and the image on the screen, and said to Liu Jia with some displeasure.

"Yes, this was a private conversation between Teacher Zhuang and me. Why are you all filming it?"

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Mr. Liu, the owner of the treasure, glared angrily at Liu Jia. He had previously flaunted this tricolor camel piece everywhere, and if the program aired and his fellow collectors saw it, he would lose all face in the antique trade.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Zhuang and Mr. Liu, we filmed this so that the audience could see it clearly. We promise that this segment will not be broadcast during the official program."

Liu Jia originally didn't plan to let the film crew shoot it, but since Deputy Director Zhu gave the order, she had no choice but to comply. Liu Jia promised not to broadcast it, but she herself wasn't sure if she could withstand it if the leaders insisted on including this segment.

"Teacher Zhuang, this segment about smashing treasures and appraising items was absolutely amazing! Let's discuss this. If you're willing to let this segment air, our station will give you and Mr. Liu 100,000 yuan. What do you think?"

The somewhat overweight Deputy Director Zhu also squeezed in, grabbed Zhuang Rui's hands and shook them repeatedly, and even offered a price to buy the broadcast rights to this video.

"Mr. Liu, are you short of money?"

Zhuang Rui released Deputy Director Zhu's hand and turned to ask the boss, Mr. Liu, who was standing next to him.

"This isn't about money. This is a private conversation between me and Teacher Zhuang. It's a private matter. If you dare to broadcast it, I will sue you."

Sunzi is not short of money, but Boss Liu still doesn't care about 50,000 yuan. He immediately warned Deputy Director Zhu in a righteous manner that he had already received 400,000 yuan, so why would he care about the TV station's compensation of 50,000 yuan?

"Can we discuss this further?"

Deputy Director Zhu, who is also in charge of business operations, understands all too well the impact that the "treasure-smashing" gimmick can have on the audience; it can definitely boost ratings significantly.

Zhuang Rui stared at Deputy Director Zhu and said, word by word, "We had an agreement beforehand, Director Zhu. If you let this program air on television without my permission, you will definitely regret it."

To be honest, Deputy Director Zhu really did have that idea. He didn't take Boss Liu's warning to heart at all. You want to sue me? Welcome! We're the media, we're all about hype, why would we be afraid of you suing us? But he would have to think twice about Zhuang Rui's words. Anyone who can make a name for themselves in Beijing's circles has a background.

After warning Deputy Director Zhu, Zhuang Rui extended his hand to Boss Liu and said, "Mr. Liu, to be honest, I have seen similar items before. They are all from the same hand as yours. Although they are fakes, their firing techniques and artistic level are quite high. It is indeed a pity to break them. Please don't take offense."

"Teacher Zhuang, you're too kind. I've learned a lot today. If you have the chance to come to Jinan in the future, please let me know. I still have quite a few items at home that I'd like to ask you for advice on."

Zhuang Rui's words made Liu feel very comfortable, and most of his previous resentment disappeared. He also admired Zhuang Rui very much. Ambition is not limited by age. Although he was young, his vision was beyond the reach of ordinary people. Liu was completely convinced that he had been defeated by Zhuang Rui.

"Dear friends, that concludes today's expert appraisal session. Tomorrow morning at 8:00 AM, the experts will continue their on-site appraisal service for another half day. We hope you won't miss this opportunity. Thank you for your participation."

While Zhuang Rui and Boss Liu were exchanging pleasantries, Liu Jia went on stage to announce the end of the day's event. However, the collectors below refused to disperse and rushed up to the stage to ask the experts for autographs. Zhuang Rui also enjoyed some celebrity treatment and felt—not bad.

The dinner that evening wasn't arranged by the TV station, but rather hosted by the Jinan Collectors Association, who invited several experts, including Mr. Liu. At the dinner, the hosts displayed the boisterousness of Shandong men, managing to get Zhuang Rui, who had a good capacity for alcohol, drunk. He was so tipsy that he didn't even know how he got back to the hotel.

Whether it was thirst or the ringing of the phone that woke Zhuang Rui, it was already bright outside when he woke up. Still feeling dizzy and lightheaded, Zhuang Rui reached for the phone from the bedside table and pressed the answer button.

"Xiao Zhuang, I called you all night yesterday, but no one answered. Is something wrong?"

The voice on the phone sounded slightly unfamiliar. Zhuang Rui shook his head to clear his mind and then recognized Gu Yun's voice.

"Brother Gu, don't even mention it. I got taken down by a bunch of guys from the Shandong Tibetan Association yesterday. What do you need me for?"

Zhuang Rui was currently cursing Jin Pangzi and his gang for being cunning and treacherous. While they were drinking, they held their glasses up quite readily, but only took a small sip, while he foolishly drank one glass after another. No wonder he got drunk.

"I've found the blueprints for your courtyard house. The overall layout doesn't need to be changed. As for the interior decoration, I've prepared several plans, but I'm waiting for your approval."

Gu Yun was a little annoyed. He and his teacher had spent two days searching through piles of documents before finally finding the document, only to find that the person in question was having a good time and had completely forgotten about it.

Upon hearing this, Zhuang Rui immediately sat up in bed and said, "Brother Gu, it'll probably be very late when we get back today. Let's meet tomorrow morning. By the way, you can arrange for someone to demolish that courtyard house first. It doesn't conflict with that."

I also want to start construction first, but that area is a cultural conservation area. If we want to demolish it, we have to apply for permission first, and you, the owner, have to come forward."

Gu Yun had forgotten about this earlier. Yesterday, when he led a group to demolish the house, they were stopped by the staff of the nature reserve. They called Zhuang Rui, but Zhuang Rui was at the treasure appraisal site at the time and his phone was not on.

"Is that so? Brother Gu, you can take some people to dismantle it today. I'll give them a heads-up about the protected area."

Zhuang Rui thought for a moment and decided that the sooner construction started, the better. After hanging up with Gu Yun, he called Director Zheng.

After hearing Zhuang Rui's story, Director Zheng immediately agreed over the phone. He was a well-connected man in Beijing and had already found out Zhuang Rui's background: Ouyang Zhenwu's nephew, who was also the old man's grandson. Such a free favor was something that was usually impossible to give away.

Chapter 319 Folk Treasure Appraisal (Part 8)

"Teacher Zhuang, are you up yet? Have you gone out for breakfast?"

Just as he put down his phone, there was a knock on the door. It was a TV station staff member calling to tell him it was time for breakfast. Zhuang Rui checked the time; it was already 7:30. He quickly rushed into the bathroom, washed up, put on his blue long robe, and then left the room.

"Hello, Teacher Zhuang..."

"Good morning, Teacher Zhuang..."

"Teacher Zhuang, could you please sign your autograph for me?"

After leaving the room, Zhuang Rui felt a little uncomfortable. It seemed that all the hotel staff knew him and greeted him so enthusiastically that Zhuang Rui couldn't take it anymore.

A vast collection of Taiwanese novels awaits your discovery.

"Damn, the service at a five-star hotel is just amazing."

Zhuang Rui was puzzled. He took the elevator to the restaurant on the third floor, only to find that Professor Tian and the others were already having morning tea and chatting. It seemed that he was the last one to arrive.

"Sorry, I overslept today..."

Zhuang Rui greeted everyone and found a chair to sit down.

"Xiao Zhuang, it's alright. It's good that you can even get up today. You know, you took down four people from the Jinan Collectors Association all by yourself yesterday." Fatty Jin laughed when he saw Zhuang Rui arrive.

"Yeah, we were just betting that you wouldn't have gotten up if you'd said so earlier."

Professor Tian joked with Zhuang Rui as well. Zhuang Rui's performance at yesterday's appraisal event, from a professional standpoint, was more than qualified to be on par with these experts, so no one was trying to assert their seniority. "Have some hot porridge to cleanse your stomach; we'll be busy this morning..."

Seeing that Zhuang Rui still had a slight tinge of alcohol on his face, Old Sun ladled out a bowl of porridge and placed it in front of him. "Gentlemen," he said, "yesterday's program has already aired on Beijing TV and Shandong TV. Once we return to Beijing, we will make a DVD of the program and give it to you as a gift..."

At the experts' table, only Liu Jia was present. It was said that Deputy Director Zhu had also collapsed at the table yesterday for his revolutionary work, but he wasn't as physically fit as Zhuang Rui and hadn't gotten up yet.

"No wonder so many people greeted me this morning."

After hearing Liu Jia's words, Zhuang Rui finally understood. It turned out that all the waitresses had watched yesterday's program. No wonder, since the program was filmed in their hotel, they would naturally pay attention to it. Once he took off his glasses and walked out of here, probably no one would recognize him.

After a quick breakfast, the group rushed to the hotel's conference room. Although there were only three hours for the appraisal in the morning, the number of collectors had increased rather than decreased, filling the conference room and surrounding area to capacity. If it weren't for the partitioned rooms, Zhuang Rui and the others probably wouldn't have been able to squeeze in.

With time on their hands and the task heavy, the two hosts didn't waste any time. After announcing the start of the folk treasure appraisal event, the experts got busy again.

Today is different from yesterday. Yesterday, at the beginning, Zhuang Rui's desk was deserted, and no one came to him to appraise antiques. Today, however, it's the opposite. A long line has formed in front of Zhuang Rui's desk, and many people have come specifically for him.

"Teacher Zhuang, please take a look for me. If you say it's real, it's real; if you say it's fake, I'll smash it right now." The person holding the treasure standing in front of Zhuang Rui's table was holding a blue and white porcelain piece and insisted that Zhuang Rui appraise it for him.

"Fellow collector, and friends below, I am a director of the Jade Association. I am here specifically to appraise jade artifacts. As for other items, the other experts are more experienced than me. Please first determine which category your antiques belong to, and then choose an expert to appraise them, okay?"

Zhuang Rui glanced behind the person in front of him and saw that the items these collectors had brought for appraisal ranged from calligraphy and paintings to bronzes—they had everything! One person was even carrying a rosewood chair, which made Zhuang Rui both amused and exasperated. He could only stand up and explain that he only examined jade.

After Zhuang Rui said that, although some people below were reluctant, those who were not jade collectors all lined up in other queues, which greatly reduced the pressure on Zhuang Rui's side.

The identification of jade artifacts is a bit more complicated because some jade artifacts, although they are artificially aged, are of good quality and contain spiritual energy. If it weren't for the different colors of the spiritual energy in ancient jade, Zhuang Rui would really have a hard time identifying them. This is because the techniques for artificially aging jade are now so sophisticated that one can easily be fooled if one is not careful.

"Teacher Zhuang, this is an item I bought two years ago. I had someone examine it, and it should be an old jade from the Han Dynasty. Could you take a look at it again?"

The jade toad that Zhuang Rui is holding now is just like that. It is carved from the finest white jade. It feels moist to the touch, clearly indicating that it has been handled. It has three different colors of patina on it. According to its owner, this is an artifact from the Han Dynasty.

"It's good jade, top-quality Hetian white jade. Such a large piece could be worth tens of thousands. However, the patina is artificially aged. The color is too pure, and if you look closely with a magnifying glass, the color doesn't penetrate very deeply. Nevertheless, this piece still has collectible value. You can keep it and play with it. It might not be much worse than antique jade."

After observing it with his spiritual energy, Zhuang Rui discovered that although there was a considerable amount of spiritual energy inside, it was white and lacked the rich purple color of the period before the Tang and Song dynasties. In other words, this so-called Han Dynasty jade toad was a later imitation.

Few people questioned Zhuang Rui's words today. After hearing Zhuang Rui's explanation, the owner of the jade toad bowed to him gratefully. If this had happened yesterday, he might have been pointing fingers and cursing.

Because there were too many people, Zhuang Rui sped up the appraisal process, basically one item every two or three minutes. These items ranged from ornaments and pendants to ancient sacrificial ritual objects, covering almost all types of jade artifacts. Although there were more fakes than genuine ones, it broadened his horizons considerably. Even the imitations were quite similar to the genuine items in terms of shape; the only difference was the era.

"Huh?"

Zhuang Rui looked at the jade cong in his hand, which was only seven or eight centimeters in size, and felt a little surprised and uncertain. Just now, when he tested the spiritual energy, he found that the spiritual energy inside was actually golden yellow. Since Zhuang Rui learned that spiritual energy could be used to identify objects, this was the first time he had encountered this color.

This jade cong is square in shape, with a square outer shape and a round inner shape. The central hole is through. The four corners of the body are decorated with shallow relief carvings of deities and animal faces. In the straight grooves on the four sides, there is a composite image of a deity and animal face carved at the top and bottom. The main deity in the pattern has an inverted trapezoidal face with double circles for the eyes and small triangular corners of the eyes on both sides. Its image is strange and mysterious.

The carving of the entire jade cong features delicate yet powerful lines, while the lines separating different areas are bold and rounded. The shape is ancient and the patterns are mysterious and unpredictable, reflecting primitive religious consciousness and the divine right of totem worship. However, it is not well preserved, with some damage in various parts.

"Could it be a jade artifact from the Liangzhu culture?" As Zhuang Rui played with the jade cong, he could feel an ancient and rustic aura emanating from it. This thought arose in his mind, and at the same time, information about the Liangzhu jade culture came to mind.

The Liangzhu culture dates back approximately 5300 to 4000 years and was mainly distributed in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River. The jade processing of the Liangzhu culture was highly developed, and in addition to decoration, it was mainly used for witchcraft, sacrifice, and burial. The Liangzhu culture had strict regulations on the use of jade and is the beginning of my country's ritual jade system.

The jade cong is the most distinctive jade artifact among Liangzhu culture jade objects and the core of Liangzhu culture jade ritual objects. In that era, drilling and wire cutting techniques were already in use, which represented the pinnacle of jade processing technology at that time.

"It should be right..."

Although this was Zhuang Rui's first time encountering Liangzhu jade artifacts, the spiritual energy contained within them and the exquisite carving techniques proved that this was a representative work of Liangzhu jade culture.

"Teacher Sun, take a look at this jade cong. I think it's a piece of Liangzhu jade, and it could be considered one of the most valuable treasures in this folk appraisal..."

Zhuang Rui called out to Old Sun, who was appraising miscellaneous items, and handed him the jade cong. In order to increase ratings and attract viewers, the TV station specially asked experts to select the three most precious antiques. However, so far, apart from a genuine work by Shen Zhou from the Ming Dynasty that Teacher Jin appraised, none of the other items have been identified as major treasures.

"Hmm, this thing is interesting, Xiao Zhuang, are you sure?"

After examining the jade cong for a while, Old Sun asked Zhuang Rui, "One of the conditions for appraising a treasure is that all experts must agree on it." So Zhuang Rui first pulled Old Sun, who was playing with miscellaneous items, along. Apart from himself, Old Sun was the most qualified to speak on the appraisal of jade artifacts.

"Xiao Zhuang, tell me your thoughts..."

When Zhuang Rui selected an item to be appraised as a treasure, Fatty Jin and the others gathered around.

Zhuang Rui took the jade cong, pondered for a moment, and said, "This is how I see it. As all the teachers know, there are not many jade cong from the Shang and Zhou dynasties. Judging from the unearthed artifacts, the cong from this period are generally small in size and mostly plain without any patterns, so we can basically rule them out."

After the Song Dynasty, some antique-style jade cong appeared, but the imitations from the Song to the Ming Dynasty were mostly decorated with the popular patterns of the time, which are obviously inconsistent with this piece.

From the late Ming to the Qing dynasty, most fake ancient jade pieces imitated the plain, short jade cong of the Shang and Zhou dynasties. Although there were also imitations of Liangzhu culture jade cong, due to differences in processing tools and habits, most fakes appeared overly smooth and lacked the antique feel, and it was even more difficult to make them look realistically aged.

Based on the above points, I can conclude that this jade cong is indeed an outstanding work of the Liangzhu jade culture. According to current cultural relic classification, it seems worthy of being categorized as a national first-class cultural relic. As one of the three important treasures presented here, wouldn't that be fair?

As soon as Zhuang Rui finished speaking, applause erupted from the audience. Professor Tian and others nodded in agreement, ultimately confirming that this Liangzhu jade cong was one of the most important treasures in this private appraisal.

#### Chapter 320 Folk Treasure Appraisal (Part 9)

Jinan is not far from Beijing and Tianjin, two major antique markets, so it certainly has a lot of good items. The Liangzhu jade piece that Zhuang Rui appraised is worth at least three million yuan.

The painting by Shen Zhou from the Ming Dynasty that Jin Pangzi selected is also quite valuable. Last year, at an antique auction in Beijing, a painting by Shen Zhou sold for a high price of 6.8 million yuan.

There are also many other trinkets, such as snuff bottles, cricket gourds, purple clay teapots, and ingot coins. Those in good condition can be worth hundreds of thousands, while those in poor condition can be worth tens of thousands. However, the third treasure of today has not yet been selected because, according to Zhuang Rui and others' standards, such a treasure must at least be representative. Of course, price is also one of the criteria for determining its value.

As time progressed, it was already 10:30 a.m., and this folk appraisal event was scheduled to end at 11:00 a.m. Thanks to the strict scrutiny of the experts, they had not made any mistakes in their appraisals. As a result, those who wanted to take advantage of the situation did not dare to come up on stage this morning. The items appraised today were all genuine collections from collectors, and their quality was relatively high, so Zhuang Rui and others found the appraisals quite easy.

Zhuang Rui appraises jade artifacts very quickly. In addition, there aren't many ancient jade artifacts that have survived to this day, so the number of people behind him at his table is getting smaller and smaller. Presumably, Zhuang Rui will be the first of the other experts to finish his work.

"Teacher Zhuang, could you help me take a look at this item? There are too many people at Teacher Liu's place, I'm afraid I won't be able to get a turn."

Just after Zhuang Rui finished appraising the last jade artifact, a middle-aged man walked up to Zhuang Rui's table with a cardboard box.

Zhuang Rui glanced at the man. Judging from his appearance, he should be in his forties, but his hair was mostly gray, making him look older. His clothes were also very ordinary, so his family background was probably not very good.

The "Teacher Liu" he mentioned is the expert in appraising bronzes and antique furniture.

Zhuang Rui glanced over there and, sure enough, even in this well-air-conditioned place, Teacher Liu was sweating profusely and busy as a bee. Even Fatty Jin was more relaxed than him.

You know, most established households have a few pieces of antique furniture. In recent years, the price of antique furniture has risen rapidly, and there are often news reports of certain huanghuali tables and chairs being auctioned for millions of dollars. So today, quite a few people brought a lot of large items. When they arrived, several large trucks were parked in front of the hotel. If you didn't know better, you would think they were moving house.

"What kind of item do you want appraised? I can only take a look first. Apart from jade and porcelain, I'm not very knowledgeable about other items..."

Zhuang Rui didn't dare to speak definitively this time, because it was easy for him to authenticate something, but if it was something he wasn't familiar with, it would be a problem if he couldn't find any flaws. Just like that Tang tri-colored camel, in the end, he was forced to smash it before the truth was revealed.

"Professor Zhuang, I need a bronze artifact appraised. Could you please take a look?"

The middle-aged man placed the cardboard box he was carrying on the table. Only then did Zhuang Rui realize that it was actually a leather shoe box. He didn't think much of the item; if it were something valuable, it would definitely have been packaged better.

"Alright, let me take a look first. Sir, what is your surname? What is the origin of this object?"

As Zhuang Rui untied the rope binding the shoebox, he struck up a conversation with the middle-aged man. Appraising antiques requires not only examining the items themselves but also understanding the person and their provenance. Otherwise, you might end up with stolen goods or something dug up from the ground. Encountering such things in private is fine, but it's inappropriate in this setting.

"Teacher Zhuang, my surname is Yang. My family has been running an antique shop for generations. However, during the Cultural Revolution, when the Four Olds were destroyed, all those things were destroyed. Only this one item was left. My elders passed away early and never explained what it was."

I'm just an ordinary laid-off worker, and I rarely see experts like you. I'd like to take this opportunity to ask Professor Zhuang for your help in determining if this is an antique and how much it's worth.

The middle-aged man surnamed Yang was somewhat reserved. He recounted his family history, his hands clasped together, revealing his nervousness. The glory of his ancestors was long gone; his current life was not easy, and his wife and children relied on his small business for a living.

Mr. Yang was unaware of this folk treasure appraisal program until he saw it on the news yesterday. He decided to try his luck today, thinking that even if the old items left at home could only fetch 30,000 to 50,000 yuan, it would still cover his child's college tuition.

"Hehe, Mr. Yang, please have a seat. Although I don't know much about bronzes, these kinds of antiques, as long as they're genuine, are incredibly valuable. Please don't rush, let me take a look first..."

To be honest, Zhuang Rui didn't really believe what the middle-aged man was saying. It wasn't because he lacked compassion, but because the antique business was full of stories. Not to mention laid-off workers, there were even stories about wives being paralyzed and children having mental illnesses. Zhuang Rui had heard many of these kinds of stories when he worked at the pawnshop.

So no matter how much you say, it's all meaningless. The truth can't be hidden, and falsehood can't be made true. You still have to see the whole thing before you say anything.

After untying the rope, Zhuang Rui reached out and lifted the shoebox. A small three-legged cauldron with green patina came into view, making Zhuang Rui's eyes light up immediately.

This is a bronze gui vessel with three legs, dating from the Warring States period. The vessel is dignified and imposing, with three strong and upright animal legs. The coiled dragon patterns on the body are clear, smooth, and three-dimensional, while the animal motifs on the legs are simple, clear, and vivid. Red spots and green patina are naturally integrated into the body, indicating it was made using the clay mold method, with clear mold lines.

The ding is one of the most important types of bronze vessels. It is a vessel used for cooking and storing meat. For more than two thousand years, from the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties to the Qin and Han dynasties, the ding has been the most common and mysterious ritual vessel.

Generally speaking, there are two types of tripods: round tripods with three legs and square tripods with four legs. They can also be divided into those with lids and those without lids. They have always been regarded as important national treasures and symbols of the state and power. Legend has it that after Yu the Great established the Xia Dynasty, he used the gold from the tribute of the nine provinces to cast nine tripods, symbolizing the nine provinces. This shows the importance of tripods in the hearts of ancient emperors.

This bronze ding vessel includes the body and lid, forming a complete set of gui vessels, which is extremely rare. It should be noted that bronze ding vessels from the Warring States period were rarely small, meaning that most ding vessels did not have lids. Furthermore, even if such vessels existed, after thousands of years, the lid would have long since separated, and they would be completely disassembled. Those that are preserved in such a complete state are extremely rare.

Zhuang Rui took the cauldron out of the shoebox, held it in his hands, touched the cold body of the cauldron, and felt the texture left by the coiled dragon patterns as they ran across his fingertips. Even without using his spiritual energy, Zhuang Rui could almost be certain that this was a genuine bronze cauldron from the Warring States period.

At the point where the three animal legs of the bronze ding connect to the body of the ding, there is an animal head. Although it is only carved with a few strokes, it clearly reveals the expression of the fierce beast and is made to look lifelike.

Perhaps due to frequent handling and playing, the patina on this bronze cauldron is very thick, showing no signs of being faked. Furthermore, the red spots and green rust on the cauldron seem to have seeped into the vessel itself, appearing as if they were naturally there, creating a harmonious effect that made Zhuang Rui reluctant to put it down for a long time.

I took the tape measure and measured it. This small three-legged bronze tripod is 23 centimeters high and the largest diameter of the round belly in the middle is 27 centimeters. When I held it in my hand to observe it, it had a very strong three-dimensional effect.

"Teacher Liu, please put down what you're holding for a moment. I think our third treasure for today is about to be revealed."

Before greeting Teacher Liu, Zhuang Rui deliberately used his spiritual energy to enter the bronze cauldron. The purplish-gold spiritual energy inside indicated that it was indeed a bronze cauldron from the Warring States period. Zhuang Rui had seen antiques from the Qin and Han dynasties, and the spiritual energy inside them was only purple, without any signs of gold.

Besides the Liangzhu jade artifact, this was the second antique Zhuang Rui had seen that contained golden spiritual energy. From these two objects, Zhuang Rui sensed that the purple spiritual energy in his eyes seemed to have the potential to evolve further, but such things are rare and cannot be sought after, so Zhuang Rui didn't take it too seriously.

"Xiao Zhuang, what good stuff have you found? You've seen all the treasures in Jinan."

The first person to arrive wasn't Teacher Liu, but Fatty Jin, the chubby successor of a master of Chinese studies. He was very approachable and kind, and had been getting along extremely well with Zhuang Rui these past two days, often cracking harmless jokes.

Teacher Jin, the painting by Shen Zhou that you chose is much more valuable than Liangzhu jade. I think you should be awarded the title of Honorary Citizen of Jinan."

Zhuang Rui believed that this bronze cauldron could definitely be one of the three most important treasures of this event, so he happily joked with Fatty Jin.

"Teacher Zhuang...you say this thing is real?"

The middle-aged man who hadn't sat down and whose eyes were fixed on Zhuang Rui rushed to the table after hearing Zhuang Rui's words and nervously asked Zhuang Rui.

"It's true, Mr. Yang. Please don't get excited. Sit down first, and let Teacher Liu take a look. Then, Mr. Qian will assess the most appropriate market price for you..."

Zhuang Rui now believed what the middle-aged man said. He knew that the man might be in some financial straits and could understand his feelings. Anyone would be so excited if they suddenly received such a fortune when they were poor.

The middle-aged man ultimately did not sit down, but nervously watched from across the table as Zhuang Rui handed the bronze cauldron to Teacher Liu. When Teacher Liu examined it with a magnifying glass, even the slightest raised eyebrow made the middle-aged man's heart race.

"Indeed, it is a genuine Warring States period bronze ding (a type of ancient Chinese cooking vessel). Congratulations, sir."

Teacher Liu's words were like heavenly music, making the middle-aged man's lips tremble with excitement, but he couldn't utter a single word.