

The Chinese Statue

By Jeffery Archer

The little Chinese statue was the next item to come under the auctioneer's hammer. Lot 103 caused those quiet **murmurings** that always precede the sale of a masterpiece. The auctioneer's assistant held up the delicate piece of ivory for the packed audience to admire while the auctioneer glanced around the room to be sure he knew where the serious bidders were seated. I studied my catalogue and read the detailed description of the piece, and what was known of its history.

Commented [VP1]: say something in a low or indistinct voice.
"Nina murmured an excuse and hurried away"
"the wind was murmuring through the trees"

Extra Material:

Sotheby's is a British-founded American multinational corporation headquartered in New York City. One of the world's largest brokers of fine and decorative art, jewelry, real estate, and collectibles, Sotheby's operation is divided into three segments: auction, finance, and dealer. **Lichuan** is a county-level city of the Enshi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, in southwestern Hubei province, People's Republic of China, located 52 kilometres west of Enshi City, the prefecture seat.

The statue had been purchased in Ha Li Chuan in 1871 and was referred to as what Sotheby's **quaintly** described as "the property of a gentleman", usually meaning that some

Important Questions

GIVE BRIEF CHARACTER SKETCH OF SIR ALEXANDER.

HOW CAN YOU CALL SIR ALEXANDER AN 'EXACT MAN'?

member of the aristocracy did not wish to admit that he was having to sell off one of the family heirlooms. I wondered if that was the case on this occasion and decided to do some

Commented [VP2]: in an attractively unusual or old-fashioned manner.
"quaintly named cottages"

research to discover what had caused the little Chinese statue to find its way into the auction rooms on that Thursday morning over one hundred years later.

"Lot No. 103," declared the auctioneer. "What am I bid for this magnificent example of...?"

Ming Dynasty

The Ming dynasty, officially the Great Ming, was the ruling dynasty of China from 1368 to 1644 following the collapse of the Mongol-led Yuan dynasty. The Ming dynasty was the last imperial dynasty of China ruled by Han Chinese

Sir Alexander Heathcote, as well as being a gentleman, was an exact man.

He was exactly sixfoot-three and a quarter inches tall, rose at seven o'clock every morning, joined his wife at breakfast to eat one boiled

egg cooked for precisely four minutes, two pieces of toast with one spoonful of **Cooper's**

marmalade, and drink one cup of China tea. He would then take a hackney carriage from his home in 11 Cadogan Gardens at exactly eight-twenty and arrive at the Foreign Office at promptly eight-fifty-nine, returning home again on the stroke of six o'clock. Sir Alexander had been exact from an early age, as became the only son of a general. But unlike his father, he chose to serve his Queen in the diplomatic service, another exacting calling. He progressed from a shared desk at the Foreign Office in Whitehall to third secretary in Calcutta, to second secretary in Vienna, to first secretary in Rome, to Deputy Ambassador in

GREAT BRITAIN IN 1870s

By 1870 it was the most industrialised and the most powerful country in the world. It possessed the world's largest Empire protected by a very formidable navy.

Washington, and finally to minister in Peking. He was delighted when Mr. Gladstone invited him to represent the government in China as he had for some considerable time taken more than an amateur

interest in the art of the Ming dynasty. This crowning appointment in his distinguished career would afford him what until then he would have considered impossible, an opportunity to observe in their natural habitat some of the great statues, paintings and drawings which he had previously been able to admire only in books.

When Sir Alexander arrived in Peking, after a journey by sea and land that took his party nearly two months, he presented his seals patent to the Empress Tzu-Hsi and a personal letter for her private reading from Queen Victoria. The Empress, dressed from head to toe in white and gold, received her new Ambassador in the throne room of the Imperial Palace. She read the letter from the British monarch while Sir Alexander remained standing to attention. Her Imperial Highness revealed nothing of its contents to the new minister, only wishing him a successful term of office in his appointment. She then moved her lips slightly up at the corners which Sir Alexander judged correctly to mean that the audience had come to an end.

As he was conducted back through the great halls of the Imperial Palace by a Mandarin in the long court dress of black and gold, Sir Alexander walked as slowly as possible, taking in the magnificent collection of ivory and jade statues which were scattered casually around the building much in the way Cellini and Michaelangelo today lie stacked against each other in Florence.

Commented [VP3]: The Original **Oxford Marmalade** is directly descended from Sarah Jane Coopers 1874 Recipe, made using Seville oranges to deliver a robust coarse cut **marmalade** with real bite. The perfect choice to wake up your taste-buds in the morning.

Commented [VP4]: Empress Dowager Cixi, of the Manchu Yehe Nara clan, was a Chinese empress dowager and regent who effectively controlled the Chinese government in the late Qing dynasty for 47 years, from 1861 until her death in 1908

Commented [VP5]: Monarchs of UK
Queen Victoria 1837-1901
King Edward VII 1900-1910
King George V 1910-1936

Commented [VP6]: **Immaculately:** in a perfectly clean, neat, or tidy manner.
"he always appeared immaculately dressed"

Important Questions

HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT SIR ALEXANDER WAS INTERESTED IN ART?

WHAT TRAITS OF SIR ALEXANDER PROVE THAT HE WAS A TRUE DIPLOMAT/ FOLLOWED HIS TRADITIONS/ TOOK HIS APPOINTMENT AS AN AMBASSADOR SERIOUSLY?

As his ministerial appointment was for only three years, Sir Alexander took no leave, but preferred to use his time to put the Embassy behind him and travel on horseback into the outlying districts to learn more about the country and its people. On these trips he was always accompanied by a Mandarin from the palace staff who acted as interpreter and guide.

On one such journey, passing through the muddy streets of a small village with but a few houses called Ha Li Chuan, a distance of some fifty miles from Peking, Sir Alexander chanced upon an old craftsman's working place.

Leaving his servants, the minister dismounted from his horse and entered the ramshackled wooden workshop to admire the delicate pieces of ivory and jade that crammed the shelves from floor to ceiling. Although modern, the pieces were superbly executed by an experienced craftsman and the minister entered the little hut with the thought of acquiring a small memento of his journey.

Once in the shop he could hardly move in any direction for fear of knocking something over. The building had not been designed for a six-foot-three and a quarter visitor. Sir Alexander stood still and enthralled, taking in the fine scented jasmine smell that hung in the air.

An old craftsman bustled forward in a long, blue coolie robe and flat black hat to greet him; a jet black plaited pigtail fell down his back. He bowed very low and then looked up at the giant from England. The minister returned the bow while the Mandarin explained who Sir Alexander was and his desire to be allowed to look at the work of the craftsman. The old man was nodding his agreement even before the Mandarin had come to the end of his request. For over an hour the minister sighed and chuckled as he studied many of the pieces with admiration and finally returned to the old man to praise his skill. The craftsman bowed once again, and his shy smile revealed no teeth but only genuine pleasure at Sir Alexander's compliments. Pointing a finger to the back of the shop, he beckoned the two important visitors to follow him. They did so and entered a veritable Aladdin's Cave, with row upon row of beautiful miniature emperors and classical figures. The minister could have happily settled down in the orgy of ivory for at least a week. Sir Alexander and the craftsman chatted away to each other through the interpreter, and the minister's love and knowledge of the Ming dynasty was soon revealed. The little craftsman's face lit up with this discovery and he turned to the Mandarin and in a hushed voice made a request. The Mandarin nodded his agreement and translated.

Commented [VP7]: In art we use the term antique or modern.
Antique items are often more valuable

Important Questions

BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE EVENTS WHICH ALLOWED SIR ALEXANDER TO ACQUIRE THE CHINESE STATUE

SIR ALEXANDER AND THE CHINESE WORKMAN, BOTH WERE MEN OF HONOUR. JUSTIFY THE ABOVE LINES.

"I have, Your Excellency, a piece of Ming myself that you might care to see. A statue that has been in my family for over seven generations."

"I should be honoured," said the minister.

"It is I who would be honoured, Your Excellency," said the little man who thereupon scampered out of the back door, nearly falling over a stray dog, and on to an old peasant house a few yards behind the workshop. The minister and the Mandarin remained in the back room, for Sir Alexander knew the old man would never have considered inviting an honoured guest into his humble home until they had known each other for many years, and only then after he had been invited to Sir Alexander's home first. A few minutes passed before the little blue figure came trotting back, pigtail bouncing up and down on his shoulders.

He was now clinging on to something that from the very way he held it close to his chest, had to be a treasure. The craftsman passed the piece over for the minister to study.

Sir Alexander's mouth opened wide and he could not hide his excitement. The little statue, no more than six inches in height, was of the Emperor Kung and as fine an example of Ming as the minister had seen. Sir Alexander felt confident that the maker was the great who had been patronised by the Emperor, so that the date must have been around the turn of the fifteenth century. The statue's only blemish was that the ivory base on which such pieces usually rest was missing, and a small stick protruded from the bottom of the imperial robes; but in the eyes of Sir Alexander nothing could detract from its overall beauty. Although the craftsman's lips did not move, his eyes glowed with the pleasure his guest evinced as he studied the ivory Emperor.

"You think the statue is good?" asked the craftsman through the interpreter.

"It's magnificent," the minister replied. "Quite magnificent." "My own work is not worthy to stand by its side," added the craftsman humbly.

"No, no," said the minister, though in truth the little craftsman knew the great man was only being kind, for Sir Alexander was holding the ivory statue in a way that already showed the same love as the old man had for the piece.

The minister smiled down at the craftsman as he handed back the Emperor Kung and then he uttered perhaps the only undiplomatic words he had ever spoken in thirty-five years of serving his Queen and country.

"How I wish the piece was mine."

ART IN MING DYNASTY

The **Ming Dynasty** ruled China from 1368 to 1644 A.D., during which China's population would double. **Known for** its trade expansion to the outside world that established cultural ties with the West, the **Ming Dynasty** is also remembered for its drama, literature and world-renowned porcelain.

During the **Ming dynasty** (1368–1644), Chinese painting progressed further basing on the achievements in painted art during the earlier **Song dynasty** and **Yuan dynasty**. The painting techniques which were invented and developed before the Ming period became classical during this period. More colours were used in painting during the Ming dynasty. **Seal brown** became much more widely used, and even over-used during this period. Many new painting skills/techniques were innovated and developed, **calligraphy** was much more closely and perfectly combined with the art of painting. Chinese painting reached

Commented [VP8]: Unwittingly, without thinking, in a fit of excitement

Sir Alexander regretted voicing his thoughts immediately he heard the Mandarin translate them, because he knew only too well the old Chinese tradition that if an honoured guest requests

something the giver will grow in the eyes of his fellow men by parting with it.

A sad look came over the face of the little old craftsman as he handed back the figurine to the minister.

"No, no. I was only joking," said Sir Alexander, quickly trying to return the piece to its owner.

"You would dishonour my humble home if you did not take the Emperor, Your Excellency," the old man said anxiously and the Mandarin gravely nodded his agreement.

The minister remained silent for some time. "I have dishonoured my own home, sir," he replied, and looked towards the Mandarin who remained inscrutable.

The little craftsman bowed. "I must fix a base on the statue," he said, "or you will not be able

to put the piece on view."

He went to a corner of the room and opened a wooden packing chest that must have housed a

hundred bases for his own statues. Rummaging around he picked out a base decorated with small,

dark figures that the minister did not care for but which nevertheless made a perfect fit; the

old man assured Sir Alexander that although he did not know the base's history, the piece

bore the mark of a good craftsman. The embarrassed minister took the gift and tried

hopelessly to thank the little old man. The craftsman once again bowed low as Sir Alexander and the expressionless Mandarin left the little workshop.

As the party travelled back to Peking, the Mandarin observed the terrible state the minister was in, and uncharacteristically spoke first:

"Your Excellency is no doubt aware," she said, "of the old Chinese custom that when a stranger has been generous, you must return the kindness within the calendar year."

Sir Alexander smiled his thanks and thought carefully about the Mandarin's words. Once back in his official residence, he went immediately to the Embassy's extensive library to see if he could discover a realistic value for the little masterpiece. After much diligent research,

he came across a drawing of a Ming statue that was almost an exact copy of the one now in his possession and with the help of the Mandarin he was able to assess its true worth, a figure that came to almost three years' emolument for a servant of the Crown. The minister discussed the problem with Lady Heathcote and she left her husband in no doubt as to the course of action he must take.

The following week the minister despatched a letter by private messenger to his bankers, Coutts & Co. in the Strand, London, requesting that they send a large part of his savings to reach him

in Peking as quickly as possible. When the funds arrived nine weeks later the minister again approached the Mandarin, who listened to his questions and gave him the details he had asked for seven days later. The Mandarin had discovered that the little craftsman, Yung Lee, came from the old and trusted family of Yung Shau who had for some five hundred years been craftsmen. Sir Alexander also learned that many of Yung Lee's ancestors had examples of their work in the palaces of the Manchu princes. Yung Lee himself was growing old and wished to retire to the hills above the village where his ancestors had always died.

Commented [VP9]: Dejected, feeling hopeless, kicking his own self, feeling he had dishonoured his home, feeling ashamed of his undiplomatic behaviour

Commented [VP10]: Reassurance, a way out

Commented [VP11]: He tried to ascertain the value, He tried to fix up a value, estimate

His son was ready to take over the workshop from him and continue the family tradition. The minister thanked the Mandarin for his diligence and had only one more request of him. The Mandarin listened sympathetically to the Ambassador from England and returned to the palace to seek advice.

A few days later the Empress granted Sir Alexander's request.

Almost a year to the day the minister, accompanied by the Mandarin, set out again from Peking for the village of Ha Li Chuan. When Sir Alexander arrived he immediately dismounted from his horse and entered the workshop that he remembered so well, the old man was seated at his bench, his flat hat slightly askew, a piece of uncarved ivory held lovingly between his fingers. He looked up from his work and shuffled towards the minister, not recognising his guest immediately until he could almost touch the foreign giant. Then he bowed low. The minister spoke through the Mandarin: "I have returned, sir, within the calendar year to repay my debt."

"There was no need, Your Excellency.

My family is honoured that the little statue lives in a great Embassy and may one day be admired by the people of your own land."

The minister could think of no words to form an adequate reply and simply requested that the old man should accompany him on a short journey.

The craftsman agreed without question and the three men set out on donkeys towards the north. They travelled for over two hours up a thin winding path into the hills behind the craftsman's workshop, and when they reached the village of Ma Tien they were met by another Mandarin, who bowed low to the minister and requested Sir Alexander and the craftsman to continue their journey with him on foot. They walked in silence to the far side of the village and only stopped when they had reached a hollow in the hill from which there was a magnificent view of the valley all the way down to Ha Li Chuan. In the hollow stood a newly completed small white house of the most perfect proportions. Two stone lion dogs, tongues hanging over their lips, guarded the front entrance.

The little old craftsman who had not spoken since he had left his workshop remained mystified by the purpose of the journey until the minister turned to him and offered:

"A small, inadequate gift and my feeble attempt to repay you in kind."

The craftsman fell to his knees and begged forgiveness of the Mandarin as he knew it was forbidden for an artisan to accept gifts from a foreigner. The Mandarin raised the frightened

blue figure from the ground, explaining to his countryman that the Empress herself had sanctioned the

minister's request. A smile of joy came over the face of the craftsman and he slowly walked up to the

doorway of the beautiful little house unable to resist running his hand over the carved lion dogs. The

three travellers then spent over an hour admiring the little house before returning in silent mutual

happiness back to the workshop in Ha Li Chuan. The two men thus parted, honour satisfied, and Sir

Alexander rode to his Embassy that night content that his actions had met with the approval of the

Mandarin as well as Lady Heathcote.

The minister completed his tour of duty in Peking, and the Empress awarded him the Silver Star of China and a grateful Queen added the K.C.V.O. to his already long list of decorations.

After a

few weeks back at the Foreign Office clearing the China desk, Sir Alexander retired to his native

Yorkshire, the only English county whose inhabitants still hope to be born and die in the same place –

not unlike the Chinese. Sir Alexander spent his final years in the home of his late father with his wife

and the little Ming Emperor. The statue occupied the centre of the mantelpiece in the drawing room for all to see and admire.

Being an exact man, Sir Alexander wrote a long and detailed will in which he left precise instructions for the disposal of his estate, including what was to happen to the little statue after his death. He bequeathed the Emperor Kung to his first son requesting that he do the same, in order that the statue might always pass to the first son, or a daughter if the direct male line faltered. He also made a provision that the statue was never to be disposed of, unless the family's honour was at stake.

Sir Alexander Heathcote died at the stroke of midnight on his seventieth year.

His first-born, Major James Heathcote, was serving his Queen in the Boer War at the time he came into possession of the Ming Emperor. The Major was a fighting man, commissioned with the Duke of Wellington's Regiment, and although he had little interest in culture even he could see the family heirloom was no ordinary treasure, so he loaned the statue to the regimental mess at Halifax in order that the Emperor could be displayed in the dining room for his brother officers to appreciate.

When James Heathcote became Colonel of the Dukes, the Emperor stood proudly on the table

alongside the trophies won at Waterloo and Sebastopol in the Crimea and Madrid. And there the Ming Statue remained until the colonel's retirement to his father's house in Yorkshire, when the

Emperor returned once again to the drawing room mantelpiece. The colonel was not a man to disobey his late father, even in death, and he left clear instructions that the heirloom must always be passed on to the first-born of the Heathcotes unless the family honour was in jeopardy. Colonel James Heathcote M.C. did not die a soldier's death; he simply fell asleep one night by the fire, the Yorkshire Post on his lap.

The colonel's first-born, the Reverend Alexander Heathcote, was at the time presiding over a

small flock in the parish of Much Hadham in Hertfordshire. After burying his father with military

honours, he placed the little Ming Emperor on the mantelpiece of the vicarage. Few members of the

Mothers' Union appreciated the masterpiece but one or two old ladies were heard to remark on its

delicate carving. And it was not until the Reverend became the Right Reverend, and the little statue

found its way into the Bishop's palace, that the Emperor attracted the admiration he deserved.

Commented [VP12]: Fastidious, proper man, man of habits,

Commented [VP13]: He was his father's son

Many of those who visited the palace and heard the story of how the Bishop's grandfather had acquired the Ming statue were fascinated to learn of the disparity between the magnificent statue and its base. It always made a good after-dinner story.

God takes even his own ambassadors, but He did not do so before allowing Bishop Heathcote to complete a will leaving the statue to his son, with his grandfather's exact instructions carefully repeated. The Bishop's son, **Captain James Heathcote**, was a serving officer in his grandfather's regiment, so the Ming statue returned to the mess table in Halifax. During the Emperor's absence, the regimental trophies had been augmented by those struck for Ypres, the Marne and Verdun. The regiment was once again at war with Germany, and young Captain James Heathcote was killed on the beaches of Dunkirk and died intestate. Thereafter English law, the known wishes of his great-grandfather and common sense prevailed, and the little Emperor came into the possession of the captain's two-year-old son.

Alex Heathcote was, alas, not of the mettle of his doughty ancestors and he grew up feeling no desire to serve anyone other than himself. When Captain James had been so tragically killed, Alexander's mother lavished everything on the boy that her meagre income would allow. It didn't help, and it was not entirely young Alex's fault that he grew up to be, in the words of his grandmother, a **selfish, spoiled little brat**. When Alex left school, only a short time before he would have been expelled, he found he could never hold down a job for more than a few weeks. It always seemed necessary for him to spend a little more than he, and finally his mother, could cope with. The good lady, deciding she could take no more of this life, departed it, to join all the other Heathcotes, not in Yorkshire, but in heaven.

In the swinging sixties, when casinos opened in Britain, young Alex was convinced that he

had found the ideal way of earning a living without actually having to do any work. He developed a system for playing roulette with which it was impossible to lose. He did lose, so he refined the system and promptly lost more; he refined the system once again which resulted in him having to borrow to cover his losses. **Why not? If the worst came to the worst, he told himself, he could always dispose of the little Ming Emperor.**

Alex took to gambling as he wanted to lead life without doing anything. Alex was remorseless, he had no guilt for selling his family heirlooms.



The worst did come to the worst, as each one of Alex's newly refined systems took him progressively into greater debt until the casinos began to press him for payment. When finally, one Monday morning, Alex received an unsolicited call from two gentlemen who seemed determined to collect some eight thousand pounds he owed their masters, and hinted at bodily harm if the matter was not dealt with within fourteen days, Alex caved in.

Commented [VP14]: Used as Verb: bestow or give something in generous or extravagant quantities on.

Commented [VP15]: lacking in quantity or quality.

Commented [VP16]: Being employed, in job

Commented [VP17]: These lines show that Alex's mother did not have a peaceful death.

Commented [VP18]: This is for 1960 when a lot was happening around the world & changes were taking place everywhere, including Britain

Commented [VP19]: To give up

After all, his great-great-grandfather's instructions had been exact: the Ming statue was to be sold if the family honour was ever at stake. Alex took the little Emperor off the mantelpiece in his Cadogan Gardens flat and stared down at its delicate handiwork, at least having the grace to feel a little sad at the loss of the family heirloom. He then drove to Bond Street and delivered the masterpiece to Sotheby's, giving

Commented [VP20]:

Important Questions

DRAW A CONTRAST BETWEEN CHARACTERS OF SIR ALEXANDER AND ALEX.

DESCRIBE THE JOURNEY OF THE CHINESE STATUE IN THE HEATCOTE FAMILY

WHY WAS THE 'FAMILY HONOUR AT STAKE' WHICH COMPELLED ALEX TO SELL THE CHINESE STATUE? WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SAME?

instructions that the Emperor should be put up for auction.

The head of the Oriental department, a pale, thin man, appeared at the front desk to discuss the masterpiece with Alex, looking not unlike the Ming statue he was holding so lovingly in his hands. "It will take a few days to estimate the true value of the piece," he purred, "but I feel confident on a cursory glance that the statue is as fine an example of Pen Q as we have ever had under the hammer."

"That's no problem," replied Alex, "as long as you can let me know what it's worth within fourteen days."

"Oh, certainly," replied the expert.

"I feel sure I could give you a floor price by Friday."

"Couldn't be better," said Alex.

During that week he contacted all his creditors and without exception they were prepared to wait and learn the appraisal of the expert. Alex duly returned to Bond Street on the Friday with a large smile on his face. He knew what his great-great-grandfather had paid for the piece and felt sure that the statue must be worth more than ten thousand pounds. A sum that would not only yield him enough to cover all his debts but leave him a little over to try out his new refined, refined system on the roulette table.

As he climbed the steps of Sotheby's, Alex silently thanked his great-greatgrandfather. He asked the girl on reception if he could speak to the head of the Oriental department. She

Commented [VP21]: Eastern- Chinese or Japanese

Important Questions

HOW MUCH HAD SIR ALEXANDER PAID FOR THE CHINESE STATUE? WAS IT FINALLY ABLE TO JUSTIFY THIS INVESTMENT? EXPLAIN.

WHY MUCH DID THE ENTIRE CHINESE STATUE SELL FOR? DID IT SATISFY ALEX?

picked up an internal phone and the expert appeared a few moments later at the front desk with a sombre look on his face. Alex's heart sank as he listened to his words: "A nice little

piece, your Emperor, but unfortunately a fake, probably about two hundred, two hundred and fifty years old but only a copy of the original, I'm afraid. Copies were often made because..."

"How much is it worth?" interrupted an anxious Alex. "Seven hundred pounds, eight hundred at the most." Enough to buy a gun and some bullets, thought Alex sardonically as he turned and started to walk away.

"I wonder, sir..." continued the expert. "Yes, yes, sell the bloody thing," said Alex, without bothering to look back. "And what do you want me to do with the base?"

"The base?" repeated Alex, turning round to face the Orientalist. "Yes, the base. It's quite magnificent, fifteenth century, undoubtedly a work of genius, I can't imagine how..."

"Lot No. 103," announced the auctioneer. "What am I bid for this magnificent example of...?" The expert turned out to be right in his assessment. At the auction at Sotheby's that Thursday morning I obtained the little Emperor for seven hundred and twenty guineas. And the base? That was acquired by an American gentleman of not unknown parentage for twenty-two thousand guineas.

Notes for further reading

The Chinese Statue | Summary & Theme

The story is set at two different locations and two different time periods. Moreover, the author has employed the technique of 'story within a story'. Though the story opens with the scene of an auction house in England, it takes us back to 1871 in a village named Ha Li Chuan in China,

The characters are well portrayed in their own perspectives. Sir Alexander's uprightness and Yung Lee's humbleness and respect for traditional values make them memorable. Though the characters are quite different from one another, one thing is common between them: love & respect for art.

The main themes of the story are appearance versus reality, the love of art, respect towards the customs & traditions and desire to own the exotics. Appearance versus reality is shown in how the Chinese statue which was thought to be an original piece of art and regarded with such high esteem turned out to be fake. On the other hand, the base of the statue which the craftsman set so casually proved to be an original piece of art worth twenty-two thousand guineas. Love for art is seen in every prominent character – Alexander Heathcote, Yung Lee and the narrator.

The ending of the story isn't what anyone would have predicted. It will be a bit of a shock to the readers but definitely not in a bad way. The author has put in a great effort in the detailing of everything; Chinese artisan, Alexander's fastidious nature, Young Lee's devoutness towards his trade & culture. And the outcome is more than beautiful.

The Chinese Statue | Title

The title of the story is the Chinese Statue and tells us the story of a Chinese Statue through several generations. The story of the statue begins with Yung Lee the old craftsman's family having possessed the statue for several generations. The statue is then passed on to Sir Alexander Heathcote who decides to pass it on to his firstborn as a family heirloom. This tradition is maintained by all successive generations of Heathcotes till it reaches the hands of Alex Heathcote who has to sell it to pay his debts for excessive gambling. The story takes us on a trip through time from Imperial China to the British Invasions and subsequent treaties with China.

The Chinese Statue | Imperialism

As the East India Company became wealthier, it started looking for other trading opportunities and sought to expand and encourage trade with China, establishing a base in Singapore to help coordinate this trade. The East India Company was interested in the tea and silk from China but the Chinese were only interested in receiving payments in silver from the British.

The East India Company produced no products of interest to the Chinese authorities. However, there was one product that was of interest to some in Chinese society; Opium. The English East India Company preferred to sell this addictive drug rather than using its cash resources for trading with China. This would eventually put Britain on a collision course with Chinese which resulted in the Opium Wars of the 1840s and late 1850s. By this time, the industrial power of Britain with its cutting edge military technology meant that it held a decisive advantage over China.

The resulting wars were fought ostensibly for 'Free Trade' principles but in reality were to allow Britain to continue its exploitative trading relationship over the Chinese. Britain was to receive Hong Kong as a base to ensure that it had access to Chinese trade and ports. This port would grow to become an important trading posts connecting the British Empire to the resources of China.

In the story the British Ambassador Alexander takes the ancient Chinese Statue from the old Chinese craftsman.....

The Chinese Statue | Rise and fall of the British Empire

The story the Chinese statue is set in 1871, after the Opium wars with China, when the British Empire was at the height of its power. Sir Alexander is an Ambassador to China and his duty is to maintain diplomatic relations with the Empress of China. Sir Alexander's son Major James serves in the Boer war, which was fought between the British Empire and the South African Republic (1899-1902). The British Empire is still strong and continues to add more colonies to its Empire.

By 1913, the British Empire ruled over 412 million people, 23% of the world population at the time, and by 1920, it covered 24% of the Earth's total land area. At the peak of its power, the phrase "the empire on which the sun never sets" was often used to describe the British Empire, because its expanse around the globe meant that the sun was always shining on at least one of its territories.

Reverend Alexander Heathcote dies somewhere around the time of the Second World War and this is the major turning point for the British Empire. Having already fought a First World War which had much effect on the resources of Britain a Second World War proves devastating to the British Empire.

Captain James Heathcote dies on the beaches of Dunkirk in 1940 where the British troops

are retreating after they are unable to free France from Germany and risk getting annihilated. This signals the end of the British as the world's most powerful country and new contenders Germany, U.S.A. and Japan and Russia challenge the dominance of the British Empire. After the war as young Alex Heathcote grows up, much of Britain's Colonial Empire has disintegrated and Alex turns to gambling to earn money and has to sell the family heirloom as the family honour is now at stake.

The Chinese Statue | Character Analysis:

The main characters in the short story are Sir Alexander Heathcote, the craftsman, and Alex. Sir Alexander Heathcote was an exact man, who had great respect for routine and traditions. He was a man of fine taste, and held a deep passion for Chinese art from the Ming dynasty – a love that made him pay a great price for a statue that he thought was made by Pen Q himself. Alex is the diametric opposite of his great ancestor. He lacked the fine taste and cultural capital that his ancestors had, and instead invested his life energy into gambling as a means to earn his living. In this Chinese Statue character analysis, we will study how the opposing characters of the Sir Alexander and his great great great grandson show the loss of tradition that happened over time.

Sir Alexander was a man of noble principles. When a humble craftsman had to do away with a statue he held dear, only because Sir Alexander casually professed that he wanted it, then great guilt haunted his heart. This is because he knew that the craftsman had only parted with the statue because his Chinese traditions compelled him to do so, i.e., part with anything a guest desires. However, when Sir Alexander finally found out that the same tradition dictated that he pay back the giver in equal measure, Sir Alexander left no stone unturned to compensate the craftsman. He not only withdrew from his bank three years' worth of his salary but also built for the craftsman a house with that money. This showed that Sir Alexander was not just a patron of the arts, but held principles and tradition in great value. His heir Alex then comes as a surprise in contrast. The remorse that he felt upon losing the Chinese statue lasted only a few moments, after which he did away with the statue at an auction house, despite the fact that his family had guarded that family heirloom for years. For Alex, tradition was of no real value, and all he cared for was money to gamble at roulette. It was at the hands of this heir that the great family heirloom was auctioned off, and with it a great family tradition was buried.

The character of the craftsman is a sketchy one. We have no way of knowing for certain if the craftsman really knew whether the statue he was giving to Sir Alexander was a genuine one. However, since it was revealed later that the statue was only two hundred and fifty years old, one wonders whether the craftsman actually tricked Sir Alexander by passing off a counterfeit as the real deal.

The Chinese Statue | Conclusion

The Chinese Statue by Jeffery Archer is an intriguing short story revolving around a statue, which was believed to be a fine specimen of Ming art but was later declared to be a counterfeit. It is indeed funny how the first owner of the statue, Sir Alexander Heathcote, made no attempts to ascertain the genuinity of the statue, and the same statue was cherished as a rare artefact for generations after him. What is more surprising is how it was actually the base of the statue that ended up being the real artefact – something that had been ignored all along for it looked nondescript in comparison to the statue it held in place.

This makes us question the disparity there is between appearance and reality. What sometimes appears valuable on the outset is of no value in reality; and sometimes, what is deemed of little value ends up being valuable. The twist at the ending of the short story drives this point home in an effective manner.