



「敦煌之美」系列講座—— ——頭大象引發的藝術實踐

The Beauty of Dunhuang Lecture Series — An Artistic Practice Inspired by an Elephant

滿芊何教授2025年11月7日講於萬佛聖城育良小學

A Talk by Professor Man Qianhe at the Instilling Goodness Elementary School on November 7, 2025

從敦煌壁畫談起大象

問：是什麼樣的人物有如此盛況宏大的場面？

中心人物由下而上：飛天仙女、蓮花、四蹄飛奔的大象——承載的是何人？

四周形象：直立菩薩、雙菩薩、散花天女、花卉、伎樂菩薩——前有菩薩乘龍引路，下有雷公護航。

大象引起的聯想

首先，當我們看到這頭大象時，會有哪些聯想？

大象象徵敦厚、安全、善良、力量、聰明……

其次，你知道大象主要有哪些品種呢？

目前我們所知道的大象主要分為非洲象和亞洲象。

最後，你能分別出非洲象和亞洲象嗎？

五大關鍵特徵：

1. 耳朵形狀：非洲象耳朵是三角形，亞洲象耳朵是四邊形。

2. 象牙：非洲象公母均長牙，亞洲象僅公象有。

3. 鼻突：非洲象上下均有突起，亞洲象僅上部有。

4. 腳趾數量：非洲草原象：前腳4趾，後腳3趾。非洲森林象：前腳5趾，後腳4趾。亞洲象：前腳5趾，後腳4-5趾。

5. 背部形態：亞洲象背部隆起，非洲象背部凹陷。

Starting with Dunhuang Murals

Q: What kind of figure is depicted in such a grand scene?

Central figure (from bottom to top): Apsaras (flying celestial immortals)—lotus—a galloping elephant—who is being carried?

Surrounding figures: Upright Bodhisattvas, twin Bodhisattvas, heavenly maidens scattering flowers, floral motifs, musician Bodhisattvas.

Leading and accompanying: A Bodhisattva riding a dragon leads the way, while thunder gods provide protection below.

Associations evoked by the Elephant

Symbolism: The elephant represents traits like kindness, safety, strength, wisdom, and reliability.

Species: African elephants (*Loxodonta*) Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*)

Key differences:

1. Ears: African—triangular; Asian—quadrilateral.

2. Tusks: Both male and female African elephants have long tusks; only male Asian elephants do.

3. Trunk: African—bumps on both upper and lower sides; Asian—only on upper side.

4. Toes: African savanna—four front toes, three back toes; African forest—five front toes, four back toes; Asian—five front toes, four-five back toes.

5. Back: Asian—arched; African—slightly concave.

耳朵 Ears



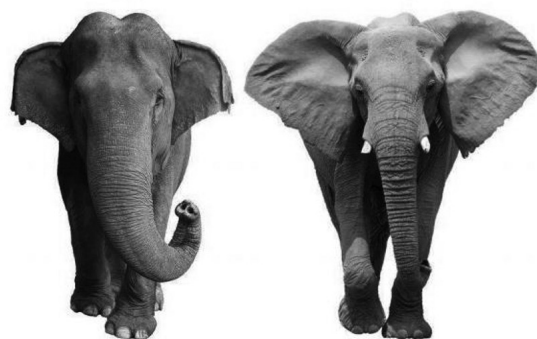
African Elephant

Asian Elephant

牙齒 Tusks

Asian Elephant

African Elephant



脚趾 Toes



背部 Back



African Elephant

Asian Elephant

敦煌壁畫中關於大象的故事

一) 乘象入胎故事

1. 莫高窟第329窟：主室西壁，描繪了佛陀乘象入胎的場景。佛陀母親摩耶夫人夢見菩薩乘六牙白象入胎，象徵釋迦牟尼誕生。這題材在敦煌壁畫中頻繁出現，是佛傳故事的重要場景。畫面構圖：仙女托舉蓮花，蓮花之上馱著白象，象背端坐佛陀，四蹄邁開呈奔跑狀，動感十足，彷彿正急切奔赴目的地。

2. 莫高窟57窟：北壁上部畫乘象入胎，講述釋迦牟尼佛的母親摩耶夫人因夢見菩薩乘六牙白象而懷孕，生下了釋迦牟尼佛。畫面上菩薩乘象緩緩而行前有飛天散花，後有伎演奏音樂，在白象的兩根長牙上還站著兩個天人，也在彈奏樂器，樂器飄逸如新月。

二) 大目犍連及五百六牙白象故事

莫高窟257窟：大目犍連及五百六牙白象的情節，源自支謙譯《須摩提女經》，屬於佛教「因緣故事」題材。故事中，

Elephant Stories in Dunhuang Murals

I) Dream of Queen Maya

1. The west wall of the main chamber in Cave 329 of the Mogao Grottoes depicts the scene of the Buddha's conception, showing Queen Maya dreaming of a Bodhisattva riding a six-tusked white elephant entering her womb, symbolizing the birth of Shakyamuni. This theme frequently appears in Dunhuang murals and is a crucial scene in Buddhist biographical stories. The composition of the painting: heavenly maidens hold up a lotus flower, upon which rests a white elephant carrying the Buddha on its back. The elephant's four legs are spread in a galloping stance, full of dynamism as if urgently rushing toward its destination.

2. Mogao Cave 57: The upper section of the north wall depicts how Queen Maya, mother of Shakyamuni, became pregnant after dreaming of a Bodhisattva riding a six-tusked white elephant, ultimately giving birth to the Buddha. In the scene, a Bodhisattva rides slowly on an elephant. Flying apsaras scatter flowers ahead, while musicians play behind. Two celestial beings stand upon the elephant's long white tusks, also playing instruments—graceful and crescent



莫高窟第329窟：佛陀母親摩耶夫人夢見菩薩乘六牙白象入胎，象徵釋迦牟尼誕生。

Cave 329 of Mogao Grottoes depicts Queen Maya dreaming of a Bodhisattva riding a six-tusked white elephant entering her womb, symbolizing the future birth of Shakyamuni.



莫高窟57窟：畫面上菩薩乘象緩緩而行，前有飛天散花，後有樂伎演奏音樂。

Mogao Cave 57: In the scene, a Bodhisattva rides slowly on an elephant. Flying apsaras scatter flowers ahead, while musicians play behind.

目犍連為響應須摩提女的請佛之願，化身乘五百六牙白象飛赴滿富城，是14個赴會情節之一。

色彩：多頭大象紅白交替間隔出現，畫面色彩強烈黑白分明。

動態：①象的姿態，後蹄向後方舒展，姿態自在活潑，彷彿在空中嬉戲。②象鼻特寫，右側白象的鼻子打了兩個捲，向上揚起，細節生動。有學者認為這裏是調皮的小象，反向而行，頑皮可愛。

三) 象王本生故事

莫高窟321窟：象王本生是佛教經典中釋迦牟尼佛前世修行的故事之一，常見於《本生經》《雜寶藏經》等文獻，核心主題為慈悲、忍辱與因果報應。

-shaped like new moons.

II) Mahā-Maudgalyāyana and 500 Six-Tusked White Elephants

Mogao Cave 257: The Story of Maudgalyāyana and 500 Six-Tusked White Elephants—The narrative originates from *Sumagadhā-avadāna Sūtra* (translated by Zhi Qian), belonging to the Buddhist “karmic cause” (nidāna) genre. In this story, Maudgalyāyana transforms into 500 six-tusked white elephants to fulfill Sumagadhā’s wish to invite the Buddha, flying to Puṇyapura—one of the fourteen such meeting scenes.

Color: The elephants appear in alternating red and white, creating a striking contrast between bold hues and clear black-and-white divisions.

Movement: 1. Elephant poses: The hind legs stretch backward, exuding playful freedom as if frolicking in midair. 2. Trunk details: A close-up shows the rightmost white elephant’s trunk curling twice upward, rendered with vivid precision. Some scholars suggest this depicts a mischievous calf moving against the flow, endearing in its naivety.

III) Jātaka of the Elephant King (Chaddanta Jātaka)

Cave 321: This story recounts one of Shakyamuni Buddha’s past lives, frequently documented in texts like the *Jātakas* and *Miscellaneous Treasures Sutra* (Skt. *Samyukta Ratna Pitaka Sutra*). Their core themes



學生作品。Students' art work.

1. 象王與妻妾：六牙白象王與一妻一妾生活，因贈蓮花予正妻，引發小妾嫉妒。

2. 小妾發願：轉生為梵摩達王妃，保留前世記憶，派遣獵人獵取象牙牙齒。

3. 獵人暗殺：獵人偽裝成比丘用毒箭射殺象王，象王敬信三寶不與抵抗。

4. 慈悲度化：象王主動將象牙撞斷贈予獵人，並發願來世「願粉碎眾生貪嗔痴如擊碎此牙。」

5. 業報結局：王妃因惡業遭雷擊墮地獄，象王轉生天道。

說明象王慈悲、忍辱、勇敢、善良的品格。

繪畫實踐

課堂討論：大象的特徵有哪些？大耳朵、長鼻子、象牙、粗壯的腿……

根據以上特徵，運用色彩繪製一幅屬於我們自己心中的大象吧！

畫面不限材料，不限大象的形態，不限顏色或線條的表達。可以繪製一個大象的動態，也可以繪製一個我們討論過的有特徵的大象局部，重點在表達內心感受。

總結

感恩遇見大家，希望小朋友們也能具有大象的品格，寬厚慈悲，堅實可靠，智慧勇氣並存。❀

encompass compassion, patience, and karmic retribution. The narrative unfolds as follows:

1. The Elephant King and His Wives: The Six-Tusked White Elephant King lived with his queen consort and junior consort. Because he gifted a rare lotus flower to his queen consort, the junior consort became consumed by jealousy.

2. The Concubine's Vow: The junior consort made a vow to be reborn as the Queen of King Brahmadata. Retaining the memories of her past life, she dispatched a hunter to retrieve the Elephant King's tusks.

3. The Hunter's Ambush: The hunter disguised himself as a monk and shot the Elephant King with a poisoned arrow. Out of deep reverence for the Triple Jewel, the Elephant King chose not to resist.

4. Compassion and Crossing over: The Elephant King voluntarily struck his tusks against a rock to break them off, gifting them to the hunter. He made a vow for his future lives: "May I shatter the greed, anger, and delusion of all sentient beings just as I have shattered these tusks."

5. Karmic Retribution: Due to her wicked karma, the Queen was struck by lightning and fell into hell, while the Elephant King was reborn into the celestial realm.

The Elephant King's virtues: Compassion, courage, kindness, and forbearance.

Art Practice

Class discussion: What are the characteristics of an elephant? Big ears, a long trunk, tusks, sturdy legs... Based on these features, use color to create an elephant as you imagine it!

There are no limits on materials, no restrictions on the elephant's form, and no rules about colors or lines. You may paint an elephant in motion, or focus on a distinctive part of the elephant that we discussed in class. The key is to express your inner feelings.

Conclusion

I am grateful to have met all of you, and I hope the students can also embody the qualities of the elephant—broad minded and compassionate, steady and reliable, with both wisdom and courage. ❀