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RESEARCH PAPER

Preserving Asian Heritage: An Analysis of Chinese Ivory Masterpieces in the Lahore Museum

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the evolution, aesthetics and cultural significance of Chinese ivory art in depth by focusing on the Masterpiece Collection displayed at the Lahore Museum. The objective of the study is to analyse how these items represent the synthesis of Buddhist spirituality, Daoist harmony, and Confucian virtues within the larger context of Asian artistic traditions. The study emphasizes how ivory changed from being a sacred substance in ancient dynasties to becoming a key tool for religious and imperial expression during the Ming and Qing eras. The study combines qualitative methodology with art-historical and iconographic analyses, archival research, and comparative examination with collections in Beijing, Canton, and London. Ultimately, it concludes that the Chinese ivory artworks in the Lahore Museum are presents the shared Asian heritage where philosophies, craftmanship and faith blends in a harmonious manner reflecting the refined carving techniques, illustrating designed features and historical importance which is equally prestigious for us as a shared heritage.

KEYWORDS Ivory Art, Elephant Tusk Carving, Chinese Gallery, Buddhist Art, Lahore Museum, Chinese Artifacts, Asian Ivory Art

Introduction

One of the most remarkable forms of Chinese decorative art is ivory carving as it carries the moral ideals, spiritual values of the culture and aspires to the aesthetic purposes that have formed over more than three thousand years (Ellsworth, R. H. 1992). Chinese ivory art reflects purity and respect for harmony as well as disciplined tradition in craftsmanship since the development of Chinese ivory from the earliest articles during the Shang dynasty to the culmination in courtly wares of the Qing dynasty (Khan, M. 2018). Ivory was premium material and symbol of integrity and moral excellence for the Chinese, this artistic activity often called as a moral and spiritual endeavour by the carver (Waley, A. 1951). The collection of Chinese ivory held at the Lahore Museum, on the other hand, is an outstanding example of the robust artistic history the countries shared as well as the significant cultural and creative connection between China and South Asian. The museum's Chinese Art Gallery has an assortment of carefully crafted ivory objects like Buddhist figurines, puzzle ball, fans, brush pots, chess and narrative tusks (Le Corbeiller, C. 1974). The following pieces demonstrate not only the skill of Chinese craftsmen but also the region's strong artistic and cultural connections to East Asia. Objects that were purchased at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century also attest to the flourishing of creative exchange along the colonial and trade routes that linked Canton, Calcutta, and Lahore (Victoria and Albert Museum. 1987). A deeper comprehension of how ivory art served as a spiritual, intellectual, and cross-cultural

medium is made possible by examining these pieces in the setting of the Lahore Museum. While openwork puzzle balls and ornamental panels show the Daoist admiration of cosmic equilibrium and natural balance, the carved Buddha images represent the Buddhist spiritual principles of compassion and meditation (Cox, M. 2008). Confucian ideals of moral discipline and hierarchical beauty are also reflected in the symmetrical form and elegant arrangement of imperial ivory artifacts (Guy, J. (2011). When combined, these components turn ivory from an artistic medium into a medium for religious devotion and Chinese philosophy. Additionally, the collection of the Lahore Museum offers an exceptional opportunity to investigate how Chinese ivory work was viewed and conserved outside of its original cultural context. This study intends to place the Chinese ivory art of the Lahore Museum within its historical development, technical heritage, and philosophical underpinnings by analyzing these items. Aside from looking at broader implications of ivory's historical journey from its venerated artistic tradition to being a disputed material in today's world, the paper will also look at how Confucian morals, Daoist naturalism and Buddhist spirituality have worked together to inform the art. Ultimately, it is hoped this research will show the Chinese ivory collection of Lahore Museum as a modern embodiment of the dialogue between art, religion and man's quest for perfection instead of a mere vestige of the past (Clunas, 2009).

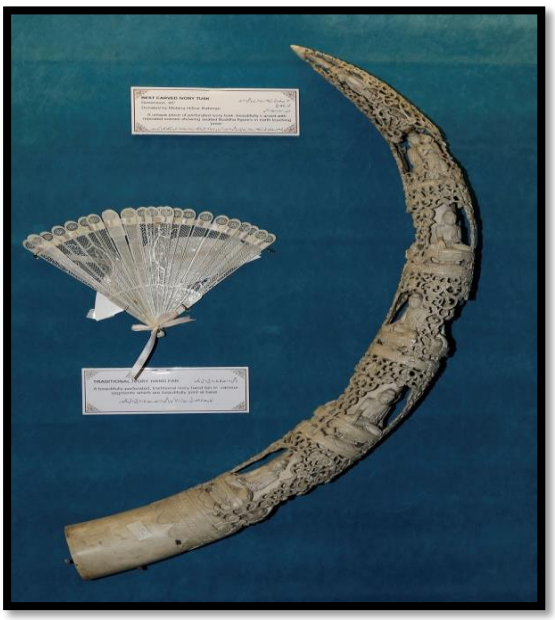

Figure 1: Sr. No.448. Ivory Tusk: Carved wit seated Buddha figure shown repeatedly. Ear touching pose and perforated work. PVR No. Accession No. CI-102, Showcase No. 62. Laho Museum Catalogue.

Historical background

Elephant ivory art and tusk carving has considered as a valuable and adaptable resource throughout human history. It has holy and spiritual associations in several cultures, represents royal authority, and has significant symbolic value with religion wherever it is found. The historical evolution of ivory art from early ceremonial objects to imperial luxury products and religious symbols demonstrates how nations used ivory to represent belief systems, political authority, and refined aesthetic standards (Welch, P. 2008). However, this beauty was also linked to a dark history of exploitation and decay which increasee the slaughter of widespread elephants for ivory resulted in environmental devastation. Although ivory artworks are acclaimed for their artistry and artistic quality, the origin of the material continues to generate serious ethical concerns throughout the history so in a result the art of ivory was banned throughout the word.

Prehistoric Beginnings: The first recorded use of ivory occurs between approximately 30,000 and 10,000 BCE, during the Upper Palaeolithic period. During the Ice Age, early human tribes in Europe carved mammoth ivory into miniature sculptures, tools, decorations, and symbolic symbols, implying both practical and spiritual significance in their society (Lahore Museum Archives. 1934). These items were symbolic rather than practical, suggesting that ivory was connected to myth, ritual, and possibly early religious or spiritual activities. Due to its accessibility and simplicity of carving, mammoth ivory was preferred, establishing the standard for following cultures to regard ivory as a valuable artistic medium.

Ivory in Ancient Civilizations: Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Levant: By 3000 BCE, early Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Levantine civilizations had made considerable advancements in ivory carving. Ivory was a luxurious commodity that was frequently imported to ancient Egypt from the Land of Punt and Nubia. Coiffures, amulets, furniture inlays, and statuettes of pharaohs and gods were all made by artisans. The substance was valued for being smooth and white, and it was believed to have cleansing and protecting properties. Similar to this, ivory was widely used to adorn temples and royal residences in Mesopotamia and Phoenicia. The well-known Nimrud ivories, which were found in the Assyrian city of Nimrud, demonstrate the high level of craftsmanship and global ivory trade that linked the Mediterranean, the Near East, and Africa. During this period, ivory was mostly used by the upper classes and represented riches, aristocracy, and divine authority (Ahmad, I. 1999).

Classical Antiquity: Greece, Rome, and the Prestige of Chryselephantine Sculpture: Ivory acquired new artistic and symbolic meanings in Greco-Roman times. Large chryselephantine statues, which are sculptures composed of a combination of ivory (which represents flesh) and gold (which represents clothing or armor), were created by the Greeks, especially during the Classical period. Phidias' statue of Zeus at Olympia, which is regarded as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, is the most famous example (Chughtai, R. 1975). It was constructed in the fifth century BCE. Using ivory for opulent domestic things, sacred artifacts, and imperial portraits, the Romans carried on this tradition. Writing tablets with hinges, known as ivory diptychs, were common ceremonial presents for the Roman nobility. Because of these applications, ivory in classical antiquity came to be closely linked with imperial authority, sophistication, and aristocratic standing.

Indian and Southeast Asian Traditions: Sacred Ivory and Temple Art: From the first millennium CE onward, ivory was firmly incorporated into religious and spiritual traditions in India and Southeast Asia (Pakistan Department of Archaeology. 1984). Ivory carving flourished all through the Gupta Empire and its dynasties, producing complex depictions of Hindu deities like Shiva, Lakshmi, and Vishnu as well as Buddhist figures like the Buddha and Bodhisattvas (Jenyns, R. S. 1971). In temples, ivory was inlaid on thrones, ceremonial objects, and decorative panels. In these communities, elephants were regarded as symbols of royal authority, celestial strength, and wisdom. Ivory carvings therefore had great symbolic significance. Ivory was frequently used in Buddhist imagery and royal ceremonial objects in Southeast Asia, especially in Thailand and Cambodia. Ivory's reputation as a material connected to grandeur, holiness, and spiritual status was solidified by its ongoing use.

Imperial China: Ivory as Symbol of Wisdom and Social Rank: China has one of the world's most sophisticated ivory carving traditions. As early as the Han Dynasty (200 BCE–220 CE), ivory was used to make brush pots, ornaments, and seals. However, the creative height of ivory carving was reached during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912). Chinese artisans were regularly employed by the imperial court to create elaborately crafted objects including calligraphy tools, figurines, small pagodas, and circular puzzle balls. Ivory represented wisdom, purity, and bureaucratic sophistication in Chinese society. It was frequently given as a sign of social standing and respect among academics, dignitaries, and officials.

African Ivory Cultures: Benin and the Role of Royal Carvers: Ivory had a significant political and cultural role in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in Ethiopia, the Congo Basin, and the Kingdom of Benin (modern-day Nigeria). The Edo people of Benin used ivory to make elaborate altar sculptures, masks, and ceremonial staffs that were vital

to royal ceremonies. (Valenstein, S. 1982). These tusks represented military prowess, royal ancestry, and ancestral loyalty and functioned as visual memory keepers in addition to being exquisite jewellery. Ivory carving is a centuries-old profession that the Oba (monarch) encouraged through specialized aristocratic guilds. In this cultural framework, ivory was used not just as an artistic medium but also as a sacred conduit that connected celestial and ancestral forces to the earthly realm. It confirmed the spiritual equilibrium, ancestral continuity, and regal legitimacy.

Medieval and Islamic Periods: Religious Art and Cultural Exchange: Ivory was frequently used in religious and courtly arts throughout North Africa, Spain, and the Middle East during the early Islamic era (7th to 15th centuries). Ivory caskets, combs, inkwells, and boxes with flowing arabesque motifs and calligraphy were made by artisans, many of these items were used as diplomatic presents or decorated palaces. At the same time, ivory was fashioned into religious icons, triptychs, and devotional panels throughout Christian Europe, especially in the Byzantine and later Gothic periods. Ivory was used as a medium for Christian prayer and storytelling in cathedrals and monasteries. Ivory is crucial for long-distance trade and cross-cultural artistic exchange, as evidenced by the constant flow of ivory that both the Islamic and Christian worlds import from Africa and Asia.

The History of Ivory Art in Asia: Although ivory has been used for creative purposes since the beginning of time, organized civilizations like ancient China and India were the ones that transformed it into a sophisticated art form. Elephants, not only important animals in and of themselves but also symbols of political and symbolic power, were available in both locations. Ivory carving in China began during the Shang dynasty (c. 1600–1046 BCE), when ivory ceremonial artifacts, combs, and hairpins were discovered in royal tombs by archaeologists. These antiquated objects demonstrate the Chinese obsession with formal elegance and simplicity. By the Han period, ivory was associated with imperial majesty (206 BCE–220 CE) (Yeo, G. 2016). Artists produced sculptures, ceremonial cups, belt plaques, and seals, often adorned with dragons and phoenixes, symbols of heavenly power and regeneration. During the Tang (618–907) and Song (960–1279) eras, the Chinese Silk Road brought new materials and methods from Central and South Asia, which improved ivory artistry. The art flourished throughout the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1912) periods, when expert carvers in Beijing and Canton (Guangzhou) produced extraordinarily detailed works such fans, Buddhist statues, carved tusks, and puzzle balls (Farrer, A. 1980) (Hay, J. 1986). Chinese ivory art is still recognized for its exquisite aesthetic and technical mastery, which were created throughout these latter eras.

Chinese Ivory Art: Techniques, Themes, and Symbolism: One of Asia's most artistically sophisticated and spiritually profound traditions is the Chinese ivory tradition. Initially, the dynasties of China fashioned ivory into beautiful items for religious, imperial, and private uses to the end of the Qing period. These artifacts exhibit the deep philosophical understanding of harmony, balance, and beauty of Chinese philosophy. Ivory was also prized in China for its symbolic connotations of moral virtue and purity for its smooth texture, pale shine, and capacity to retain fine details (Laing, E. J. 1996). The purity of ivory was seen by the Chinese as a sign of honesty and wisdom, which made it the perfect material for religious or academic items. In Canton (Guangzhou), Suzhou, and Beijing, ivory carving hubs grew. Hundreds of artisans who were experts in various carving phases worked in the Qing dynasty's (1644–1912) Cantonese workshops, which gained international renown. A few artisans were in charge of sketching designs, while others were In charge of intricate carving or polishing. The carving of a single huge tusk may take months or even years to finish (British Museum. 1989).

Literature Review

The literature on Chinese ivory art emphasizes its evolution as a moral and spiritual medium, rather than primarily ornamentation. Scholars like Ellsworth (1992) and Waley (1951) characterize ivory carving as a statement of purity, discipline, and inner harmony, all of which are basic components in Confucianism and Buddhism. The Shang and Han dynasties established ivory as a material of moral virtue and imperial distinction, while the Ming and Qing dynasty improved its symbolic and technical sophistication (Khan, 2018) (Guy, 2011). Researchers such as Farrer (1980) and Clunas (2009) attribute this creative progression to the spiritual union of Daoist balance and Confucian order, which gave Chinese ivory philosophical depth. According to Ahmad (1999) and Omer (1986), the Lahore Museum's collection represents this combination with artistically carved tusks, Buddhist figurines, fans, and chess sets that embody the principles of peace, compassion, and intellectual refinement. The literature also emphasizes the importance of cross-cultural exchange in the transmission of Chinese ivory artifacts beyond Chinese borders.

According to Um (2020) and Chughtai (1975), colonial trade routes in the nineteenth century provided the introduction of Chinese art artifacts into South Asia through collectors such as Maulana Hafiz-ur-Rehman, whose gifts formed one of Pakistan's most valuable Chinese collections. These items represent both creative excellence and the cultural connections generated by imperial networks that connected Canton, Calcutta, and Lahore. The Lahore collection's stylistic elements, such as openwork carving, perforated puzzle balls, and narrative tusks, have similarities of Cantonese workshops described by Lockhart (1893) and the British Museum (1989). Scholars such as Liu (2009) and Hay (1986) attribute these traits to multi-phase carving procedures that involve precision, depth, and elaborate symbolism. Harrison-Hall (2017) and Blair and Bloom (1994) see the Confucian emphasis on symmetry and hierarchy, the Daoist flow of natural images, and the Buddhist calm of expression as coexisting within a single artistic tradition.

According to Laing (1996) and Cox (2008), the ivory medium transforms into a spiritual metaphor, an embodiment of purity and enlightenment. However, modern works like as those by Welch (2008, 2012) and Yeo (2016) introduce concerns about ivory as a contentious material, arguing that aesthetic love of such items must coexist with an understanding of environmental and moral implications. The Lahore Museum's collection, therefore, stands not only as a testament to craftsmanship and intercultural exchange but also as a subject for ethical reflection on cultural heritage preservation in the modern era. The research problem identified in this study stems from the limited academic attention given to Chinese ivory artifacts preserved outside the China, particularly within South Asian contexts. The main context explores how the Lahore Museum's Chinese ivory collection can be understood as both a unique example of East Asian philosophical aesthetics and a tangible product of colonial cultural interaction. The study investigates the spiritual and aesthetic principles underlying these artifacts, their role in Sino-South Asian artistic exchange, their technical and stylistic attributes that attached them to Chinese workshops, and the shifting ethical perceptions of ivory art in the contemporary period.

Material and Methods

The study uses an interdisciplinary, qualitative approach that integrates with artistic, historical, iconographic, and comparative analytical frameworks to answer these problems. The primary data is used from the Lahore Museum's Chinese antiquities, its historical donation records, and visual documentation serve as primary sources available at the display in the Lahore Museum. Secondary sources include academic publications

and online catalogues from the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and research on the Cantonese ivory trade. The analytical framework integrates formal stylistic study, iconographic interpretation, and comparative analysis with comparable artifacts in Beijing and Canton. First-hand photographic documenting of Chinese ivory objects on exhibit in the Chinese Art Gallery of the Lahore Museum was another basic component of this research technique. In order to ensure authenticity and firsthand observation of each artifact's artistic and historical qualities, the researcher got official permission from the Head of the Chinese Art Gallery to examine museum archives, acquisition documents, and comprehensive object catalogues. This approach makes it possible to understand Chinese ivory art in its whole as an expression of technical proficiency, cultural philosophy, and historical connectivity.

Chinese Art Aesthetics

Chinese artisans employed a range of instruments, including drills, abrasives, and blades, to create the intricate detailing and multi-layered depth that set their creations apart. In order to create the appearance of three-dimensional space, they created unique techniques including "openwork carving", which involves cutting through the material to form lattices or perforated layers, and "multi-layer carving", which involves building sceneries in relief within relief (Lahore Museum Archives. 1940). A variety of distinctive Chinese ivory art pieces, including carved tusks, puzzle balls, Buddha statues, fans, brush pots, and chess sets, may be found in the Chinese Art Gallery of the Lahore Museum. Every form reflects a specific aesthetic philosophy and use (Grindlay, P. J. 2003).

One of the most prominent displays of East Asian workmanship in South Asia is the Chinese ivory collection at the Lahore Museum. Maulana Hafiz-ur-Rehman, a well-known scholar, art collector, and cultural patron from Lahore, generously donated a large portion of this unique collection, which includes carved ivory tusks, chess sets, hand fans, mirror frames, fly whisks, and ceremonial objects (Um, N. 2020). During the early twentieth century, Maulana Hafiz-ur-Rehman purchased a number of Chinese antiquities from art merchants and collectors in British India, mainly from Canton (Guangzhou) and Beijing, the leading hubs of ivory carving during the Qing era (1644-1911) (Lockhart, J. S. 1893). Acknowledging their artistic and historical significance, he donated this collection to the Lahore Museum in order to enhance its collection and encourage the public and academics to appreciate Asian art.

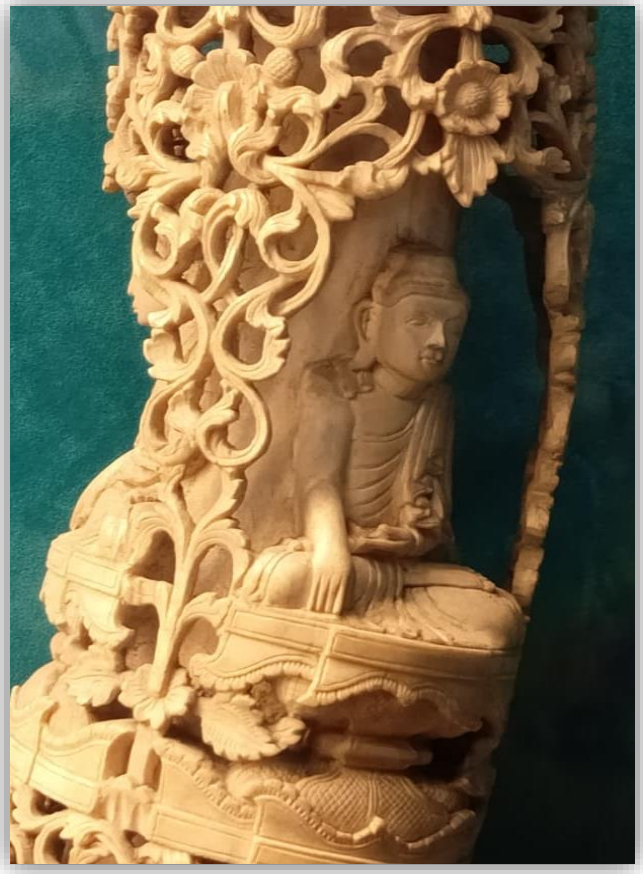

Figure 2: Self Captured Image

One of the most recognizable examples is a carved tusk. These lengthy, curved ivory panels are elaborately embellished with ongoing narrative scenarios, like as processions, landscapes, or life stories of the Buddha. Frequently starting from the base and working their way upward, the carvers used the tusk's inherent curve to direct the composition's rhythm. The carved tusk at the Lahore Museum, which features more than a hundred tiny figures in high and low relief, is a masterpiece of this type and depicts Buddhist pilgrims and celestial entities. Another well-known shape is the puzzle ball, a spherical sculpture made from a single block of ivory that is divided into multiple concentric hollow spheres. Only thin internal bridges hold each layer together as it rotates freely inside the others. Puzzle balls, which are frequently held by carved dragons or placed on pedestals, represent the harmony of heaven, earth, and humanity as well as the intricacy of the cosmos. Chinese ivory craftspeople also produced excellent brush pots and fans. The fan was a useful and symbolic item that stood for elegance and sophistication. Flowers, phoenixes, and other auspicious symbols are openwork motifs seen on ivory fans at the Lahore Museum. A necessary item at the scholar's workspace, the brush pot represented the development of the mind. Many ivory brush pots depict landscapes, pavilions, and scenes of scholars at leisure, visual expressions of the Confucian ideal of a balanced and moral life. Chinese ivory art is distinguished by its harmony, symmetry, and restrained grace.

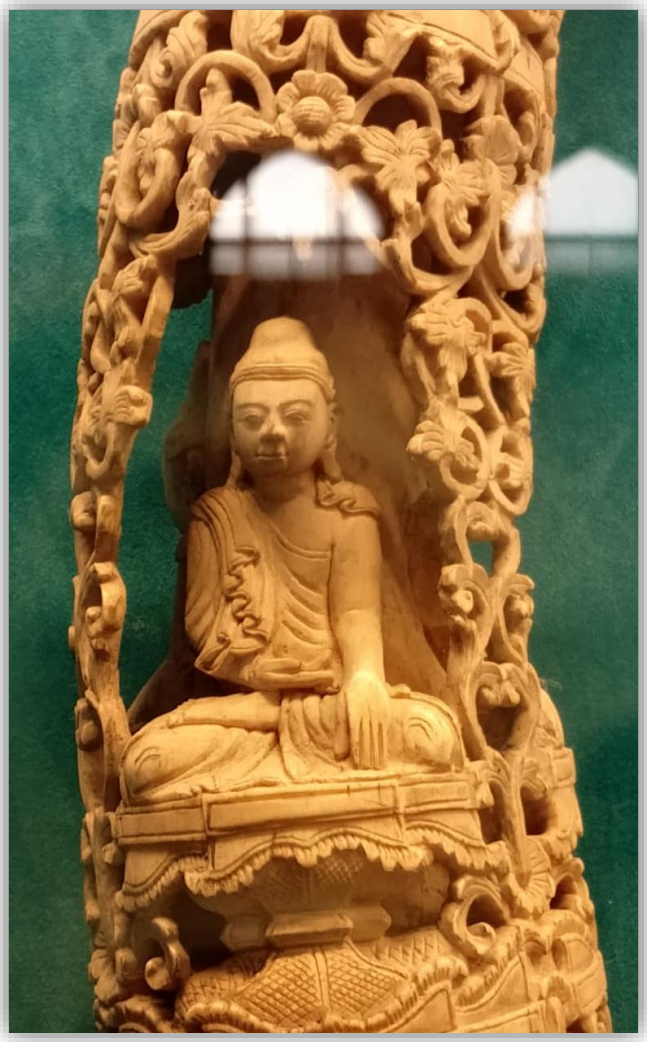

Figure 3: Self-Captured Image

Unlike materials like jade or copper, ivory allowed painters to emphasize linear rhythm and spatial layering. Chinese sculptors often used multi-plane composition, where the background and foreground mix together with varying degrees of relief and subtle shading. Chinese ivory art has deep spiritual and cultural roots that are influenced by three major philosophies: Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism (Harris, R. S. 2005). The Lahore Museum's Chinese Art Gallery employs excellent workmanship to offer a window into China's natural, spiritual, and moral world through the carving of fine ivory, the expression of emotions, and the selection of subjects.

Confucian Ethics: Social harmony, discipline, and order:

Confucian philosophy emphasizes morality, hierarchy, and conformity to tradition (Harrison-Hall, J. 2017). These ideas are reflected in ivory artworks that prioritize symmetry, balance, and fine detail. The carvers often depicted intellectuals reading all depictions of Confucian virtue and discipline, families displaying filial piety, or authorities in ceremonial settings (Harrison-Hall, J. 2017). Numerous ivory brush pots and scholar figurines at the Lahore Museum exhibit this influence. The sculptures have flawless symmetry, deliberate proportions, and great restraint. (Fang, C. 2002). Every component, from the scholar's robe folds to the formal landscape background, embodies the Confucian values of harmony and self-improvement. These pieces were most likely made for scholars or collectors who valued both beauty and moral advancement via art.

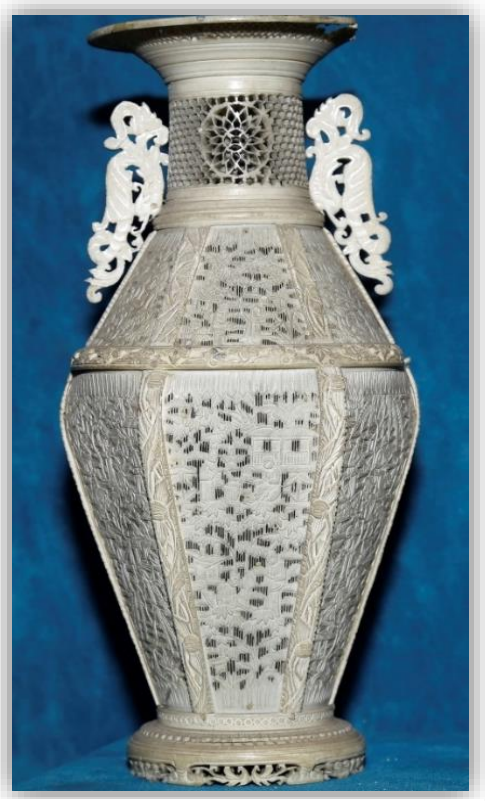

Figure 4: Sr. No. 119, White Ivory Vase: Hexago Circular Ringed Base, Perforated, PVR No. Accession No. CI-133 Showcase No. 79-80, (Dama on Rim, need to be restore)

Daoist Philosophy: The Flow of Life, Nature, and Balance

Daoism emphasizes the concept of *wu wei*, or effortless activity, and encourages harmony with nature and balance between opposites. In ivory art, this ideology takes the form of organic, flowing designs and natural motifs like peaches, clouds, waves, mountains, and cranes, all of which are symbols of immortality and natural flow (Brown, K. 1999). Openwork carvings and ivory puzzle balls with Daoist influences can be found in the Chinese area of the Lahore Museum. The intricate layers of these works, which revolve within each other, graphically convey the Daoist concept of yin and yang, or the unity of motion and stillness. Similar to this, ivory representations of Daoist hermits or immortals are displayed in calm positions amid mountains and trees, signifying a life in touch with the rhythm of nature and independence from material restraints (Blair & Bloom, 1994).

Figure 5: Sr. No. 122, Ivory Ball: Perforated work inner assembling each other outer shell shows round design seated human figures, PVR No. 158, Accession No. Ci- Showcase No 28. (Demage)

Buddhist Spirituality: Meditation, Enlightenment, and Compassion

Buddhism introduced the concepts of inward reflection, compassion, and peace to Chinese art. This impact can be seen in the tranquil facial expressions of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, the serene robe curves, and the soft hand motions found in ivory carvings (Lahore Museum. 1980). The purpose of these pieces was to provoke spiritual reflection in addition to portraying a deity. A second, smaller image of the sitting Buddha evokes the same sense of peace and kindness, it is a visual representation of a silent lesson. With his eyes half-closed in meditation, his face is serene and gentle, the flowing draperies and polished surface evoke the Buddhist idea of inner light and purity (Tariq, F. 2017). These three philosophical influences Buddhist compassion, Daoist harmony, and Confucian order complete the image of Chinese thinking when seen in the Lahore Museum. The Buddhist sculptures provide enlightenment and spiritual serenity, the Confucian pieces stress human duty and moral discipline, and the Daoist pieces honor the beauty of nature and balance (Rawson, C. S. 2015).

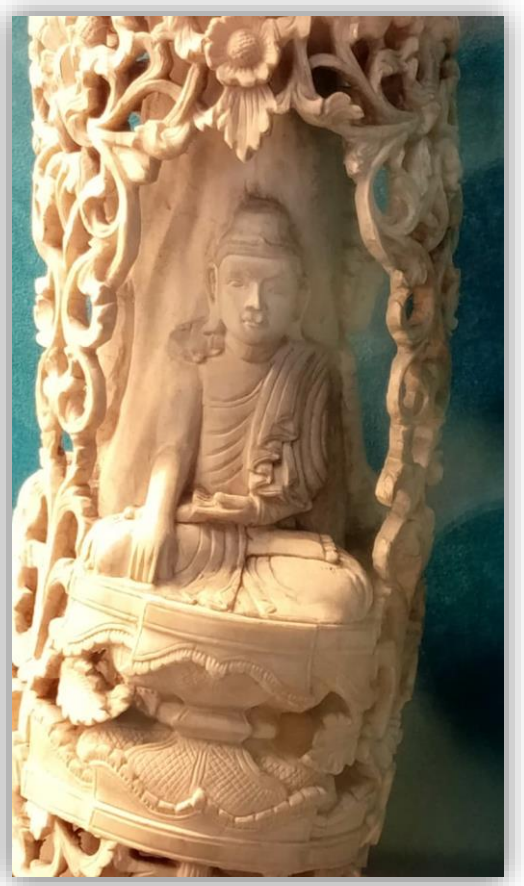

Figure 6: Seated Budddha: Sr. No.448. Iv Tusk: Carved with seated Buddha figure sho repeatedly. Earth touching pose and perfora work. PVR No. 86, Accession No. CI-1 Showcase No. 62. Lahore Museum.

Instead of separating these concepts, Chinese artisans frequently combined them, as the collection of the Lahore Museum demonstrates. For example, a Confucian-accurately carved ivory panel might show a Buddhist scenario set amid a Daoist setting, exemplifying the Chinese ideal of harmony between the "Three Teachings." This combination lends the compilation a deep intellectual coherence in addition to artistic depth. The aesthetics of balance and restraint are fundamental to Chinese ivory art. Instead of over-adorning the material, the Chinese artist aimed to bring out its inherent beauty.

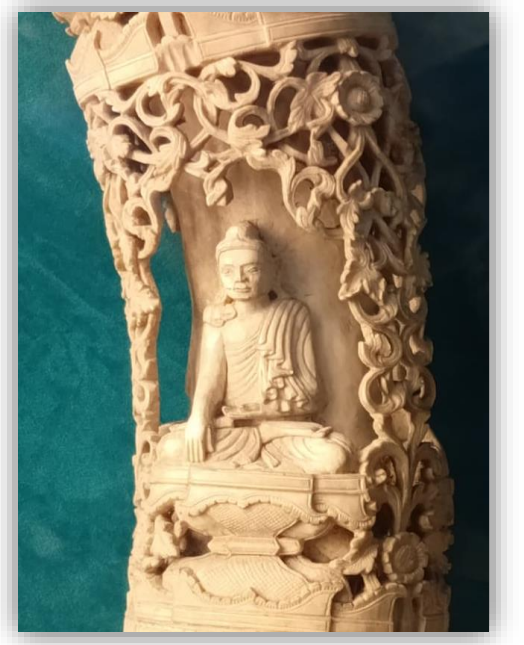

Figure 7: Seated Buddha, Self-Captured Image

A conversation between the constructed and the natural was created by frequently leaving the smooth white surface exposed in contrast to carved areas. The Chinese Art Gallery of the Lahore Museum has many remarkable examples of these traditions. The majority of the miniature sculptures, fans, carved tusks, and ivory Buddha figures in its collection date from the late Qing period. A

large carved tusk that shows the Buddha teaching his disciples under a forest canopy is one such example. The arrangement directs the viewer's attention from the terrestrial to the celestial realm by following the tusk's natural arc. Each figure is skilfully created, with their robes flowing gently in rhythmic folds. The backdrop clouds and lotus blossoms are traditional symbols of purity and transcendence. The carved ivory elephant tusk on display at the Chinese Art Gallery of the Lahore Museum is a rare relic that perfectly captures the narrative artistry, technical ability, and religious commitment typical of late Qing dynasty ivory carving (c. eighteenth to nineteenth century) (Scott, R. 2008). A continuous relief representing episodes from the life of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, who lived in India circa the fifth century BCE, covers the tusk, which has been softly bent and polished to a natural sheen (Capon, E. 1992). The Buddha is portrayed in several of scenarios along the spiral growth of the tusk that represent key events in his spiritual journey, including his birth at Lumbini, the Great Renunciation, his enlightenment under the Bodhi tree, the First Sermon at Deer Park, and the ultimate Nirvana. Shakyamuni Buddha, who stands out for his long earlobes, ushnisha (cranial protuberance), and calm disposition, dominates the main scene. He is typically positioned in the composition's top or centre to symbolize enlightenment as the ultimate goal of every human being.

Figure 8: Shakyamuni Buddha

The tusk is a perfect illustration of the advanced carving technique used in Cantonese (Guangzhou) ivory arts, which is connected to the accuracy and depth of the Qing period's story. It displays Buddha's statue, plants, celestial beings, and temple architecture on a small scale while maintaining compositional clarity and anatomical proportion. The Buddhist path to enlightenment is represented visually by this narrative spiral, where the devotee's spiritual ascent is symbolized by the tusk's upward curve. The scene arrangement shows that the carver was influenced by Chinese scroll painting traditions, in which a tale is revealed gradually as the viewer's eye moves across time and space. While the Lahore tusk has significant artistic ties to southern China, particularly Guangzhou, similar ivory carvings were also made in Beijing and Fujian, however the latter places chose smaller religious figures over giant narrative tusks (Little, S. 2000). Guangzhou was uniquely positioned as

Figure 9: Sr. No.448. Ivory Tusk: Carved v seated Buddha figure shown repeate Earth touching pose and perforated w PVR No. 86, Accession No. CI-102, Showc No. 62. Lahore Museum Catalogue.

a hub of both religious and export ivory carving because it had access to imported African and Southeast Asian elephant ivory via maritime commerce. The city's artisans created a style characterized by deep relief carving, elaborate architecture, and densely inhabited compositions, all of which can be seen in the Lahore Museum tusk.

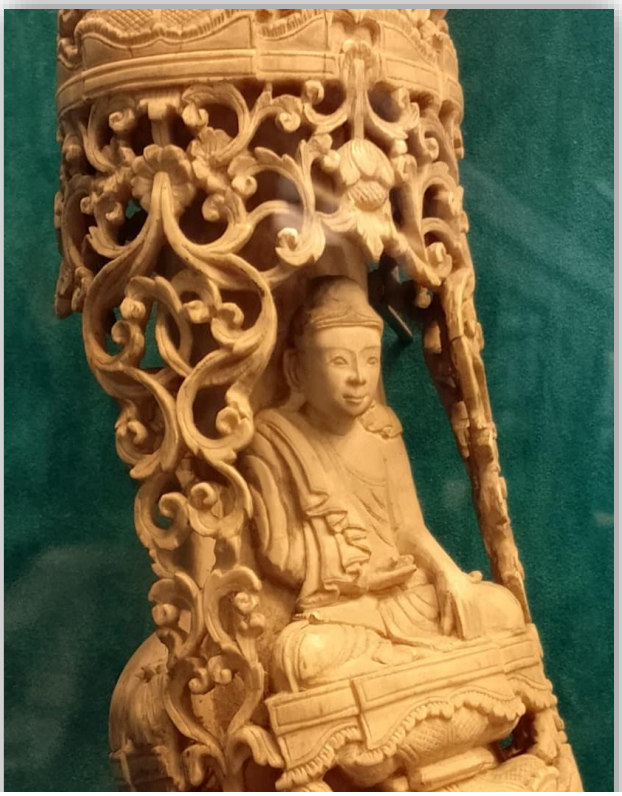

Figure 10: self-Captured Image, Sr. No.448. Ivory Tu
Carved with seated Buddha figure shown repeatedl
Earth touching pose and perforated work. PVR No. 8
Accession No. CI-102, Showcase No. 62. Lahore Muse
Catalogue.

The Buddha on this tusk is most likely Shakyamuni, the Enlightened One, according to religious iconography. However, some tusks from the Qing era also featured smaller representations of Amitabha Buddha, the Buddha of Infinite Light, or Guanyin (Avalokiteshvara), the Bodhisattva of Compassion, positioned among attendant deities. The Lahore tusk was made as a didactic and devotional artifact, intended to visually convey Buddhist teachings for meditation and moral instruction, as evidenced by the appearance of monastic followers and celestial beings in its relief. Thus, the carving combines narrative storytelling with meditative symbolism, reflecting the marriage of Chinese workmanship and Buddhist philosophy (Welch, P. R. 2012). Between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, similar tusks were made in southern China, particularly in Canton (Guangzhou), and occasionally in Beijing factories under imperial sponsorship. Though the stylistic approaches varied, similar Buddhist ivory carving was undertaken outside of China in Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, and Sri Lanka. Southeast Asian ivory sculptures tended to stress a single seated Buddha or guardian figure rather than intricate narrative sequences. In contrast, the use of a complete tusk as a narrative surface in China was a reflection of both the technical ingenuity of Cantonese artisans who specialized in continuous story reliefs and the impact of Buddhist mural painting. n conclusion, the carved Buddha on the ivory tusk of the Lahore Museum is most likely Shakyamuni, the real Buddha, accompanied by scenes from his life and teachings. The relic comes from the late Qing dynasty's Guangzhou ivory carving studios, when craftspeople developed the art of turning elephant tusks into religious narrative scrolls. Few pieces can rival the Lahore tusk's size, intricacy, and religious purity, although similar pieces were made in Beijing and exported throughout Asia. As a timeless testament to the common artistic and spiritual heritage of Asia, it stands today as an artistic remnant of Buddhist narrative in ivory.

An ivory puzzle ball perched atop a pedestal depicting dragons pursuing a pearl a metaphor for wisdom's quest is another highlight. More than a dozen layered layers make up the ball, and geometric and floral designs puncture each layer. The infinite complexity of the universe kept together by harmony is depicted, showcasing the technical mastery and philosophical depth of Chinese carving. Additionally, the collection features minor household objects like ivory chess pieces and brush pots that are adorned with images of scholars in boats, gardens, or temples. These items represent the ideal of the scholar-gentleman in society, who strikes a balance between art, study, and the natural world. It is an expression of cosmic and moral order rather than just ornamentation. Every piece demonstrates the artist's quest for harmony between idea and material, effort and soul.

Figure 11: Sr. No. 122, Ivory Ball: Perforated work inn ball assembling each other outer shell shows round des and seated human figures, PVR No. 158, Accession N Ci-201, Showcase No 28. (Demage)

One of the most exquisite examples of late Qing dynasty craftsmanship is the ivory chess set on display at the Chinese Art Gallery of the Lahore Museum. It demonstrates both the skill of Chinese ivory carvers and the nineteenth-century cultural exchange between East and West (Ho, A. D. 2010). The set, which is made entirely of white elephant ivory, is an example of how Chinese artistic symbolism and European form have been combined to reimagine the ancient game of chess from the perspective of Chinese courtly life. A characteristic of Cantonese ivory artistry, each piece is expertly carved and set atop a finely pierced openwork sphere that represents the universe's cosmic harmony. The larger figures, showing an emperor and empress as king and queen, contrast gracefully with the mounted warriors, mandarins, and pagoda-like rooks that dominate the board (Buckley, R. 2018). The chessboard, which is constructed of wood or lacquer and features etched landscape motifs, converts the game into a miniature imperial tableau that combines recreation and representation.

Figure 12: Ivory Chess: Traditional White Ivory Chessm from China, PVR No. 88, Accession No. Ci-105, Showca No. 62, Lahore Museum.

There is another art piece, its usage of dyed red and natural white ivory to symbolize the two opposing sides sets it apart from the white chess set currently in the museum. In Chinese culture, red was traditionally associated with wealth, vigor, and good fortune, while white was associated with purity, wisdom, and spiritual serenity (Omer, N. 1986). This use of color not only created visual contrast but also carried symbolic meaning. Vermilion pigment, a dye derived from cinnabar, was used to give the ivory its red hue. Alternatively, natural vegetable dyes were used to stain it, and a thin layer of lacquer was applied to seal it. This sort of ivory chess set was most likely made at Canton (Guangzhou), China's main port city during the Qing dynasty, where specialist ivory workshops served both imperial patrons and the European export market (Qureshi, M. A. 1984). Cantonese carvers were renowned for their ability to generate astounding detail and depth with the most basic of hand tools, transforming imported elephant tusks into objects of luxury and cultural interchange. Similar ivory chess sets from the same era can be found in significant international collections, such as the British Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. These collections contain Cantonese ivory pieces with nearly identical figurative and technical qualities.

Figure 13: Ivory Chess: Traditional Red Ivory Chessmen from China, PVR No. 89, Accession No. Ci-105, Showcase No. 62, Lahore Museum.

The Lahore Museum's elaborately carved ivory hand fan is a magnificent example of 19th-century Chinese export art. Delicate openwork decorations, such as flowery scrolls, lattice patterns, and occasionally depictions of nature or courtly life, penetrate each fan slat. The skill of the craftspeople from Canton (Guangzhou), where ivory fans were among the most sought-after export commodities, is demonstrated by the accuracy of these carvings. Noblewomen and courtiers employed these fans as status symbols and fashion accessories, and they were prized for their cooling properties and grace at formal events. Chinese concepts of grace, order, and refinement are represented by the symmetrical filigree carving and the ivory's flawless white luster (Liu, Y. Y. 2009).

Figure 14: Ivory Hand Fan: A Beautiful perforated, traditional ivory hand fan in various segments which beautifully jointat base. PVR No. 87, Accession No. C 103, Showcase No. 62, Lahore Museum.

The horse-tail fly whisk, with a carved ivory handle, represents purity and detachment in Buddhist and Daoist thought (Elias, J. H. 2014). This sophisticated fly whisk, on display at the Lahore Museum, has long horsehair strands fastened to an exquisitely carved ivory handle which represents as a bug repellents as ceremonial items carried by monks, academics, or court officials to represent wisdom, dignity, and purity in the Chinese history. This is the example of Cantonese (Guangzhou) ivory work from the late Qing era (19th century) which is characterized by its clean polished surface, elegant linear carvings, and floral designs. The tight connection between everyday practicality and creative workmanship in Qing ornamental arts is demonstrated by the use of ivory, which expresses both richness and refinement. This specific whisk's ivory handle indicates that it belonged to a person of great social or religious status, perhaps an official, scholar, or abbot of a temple. A valuable substance connected tvirtue, purity, and royal grace was ivory. A important idea in Chinese aesthetics, balance between strength and tenderness, was symbolized by the contrast of textures created by the mix of ivory and horsehair: firm and flowing. Cantonese craftspeople were well known for producing domestic and ceremonial ivory goods, frequently for export to temples and wealthy homes. Similar examples can be seen in the Palace Museum in Beijing, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, and a number of Buddhist monasteries throughout East Asia, where ceremonial regalia included fly whisks with ivory or jade handles.

Figure 15: Sr. No. 447. Ivory Fly Whis Handle of Solid Ivory. PVR No.85, Accession No. CP-101, Showcase No. Lahore Museum Catalogue. (Badly Damaged)

An excellent example of late Qing dynasty decorative skill, the ivory mirror frame on display at the Chinese Art Gallery of the Lahore Museum was probably made in Canton (Guangzhou) in the nineteenth century. It is a rectangular shape with an intricate carving of two elephants on either side of a flowery motif, which in Chinese art represents fortitude, knowledge, and good fortune. The surface of the frame is covered with a systematic pattern of delicately carved circular motifs that symbolize cosmic unity and balance. The Cantonese ivory carvers' technical skill and attention to symmetry are evident in the delicate flower and scroll motifs that surround the margins. Originally, the frame would have held a polished glass or bronze mirror that the Chinese aristocracy used in their studios or dressing rooms. In addition to its practical function, it represented the owner's social standing and

Figure 16: Ivory Mirror Frame: Upper Part Decorated Floral design and dragon on both sides. PVR No. 157, Accession No. Ci-205, Showcase No. 28. Lahore Museum Catalogue.

sophistication. Moreover, apart from being functional, it also served to demonstrate the identity of its owner in terms of the status and personality. Thus, in its materials and themes, it relates to Confucian aesthetics which is about self-cultivation and state-based order, according to which "inner virtue and outward beauty can never come into open conflict".

Figure 17: Sr. No. 118. Ivory Paper Cut Perforated work margin plain in red colour. PVR No. 156, Accession No. C 203, Showcase No. 28.

The work from the Lahore Museum is a good example of Chinese courtly elegance and magnificent craft, as the overwhelming majority of its sumptuous decoration has been preserved. The Lahore Museum's Chinese Art Gallery collection is a stunning example of Qing period artisanal artistry. Unfortunately, most of the things on exhibit are miniature. It is an early 19th-century red ivory paper cutter probable to have been manufactured in Canton, China, aka Guangzhou. Its vibrant vermilion color gives a striking contrast of Chinese artistry done by materials like this. It was carved out of a solid piece of elephant ivory into the shape of a carved handle. The handle making has scrolling patterns of Chinese scrollery that are striking as it is accented by the reddish coloration, a distinguishing element of the scarlet tincture of the piece. The Chinese artisan is noted for the rhythmic symmetry of his lines. There is a flower from the handle that provides a great contrast of a green on the reddish tinge. It also has collages that are geometrically designed in low relief. The latch is clean and well tapered and is well polished smooth. These aspects make it ideal to cut papers or folded sheets since they give a fine blunt fringe. During the Qing period, paper cutters like this were vital instruments in a scholar's or official's study, used for cutting book pages, trimming scrolls, and preparing documents. However, when constructed of ivory and coloured red, they went beyond plain practicality and became status symbols. In Chinese tradition, ivory stands for purity and elegance, whereas crimson is associated with wealth, good fortune, and vigor. Together, they created an exquisite visual harmony that symbolized the union of moral virtue and material excellence, two things that are highly valued in Chinese academic life. In order to preserve the ivory's sheen, natural cinnabar or vegetable-based dyes were carefully used to achieve the cutter's red colour. The object's elaborate carving and flawless polish indicate that it was made in a Cantonese export workshop, where artists specialized in luxury items for both home scholars and foreign collectors (Rauf, A. (2001). Similar paper cutters were sold as a part of stationery set to British India and Europe in the nineteenth century (Lahore Museum Archives. (1900–1940). Within the Lahore Museum, this red ivory paper cutter represents the refinement of Chinese scholarly culture, in which intellectual tools were viewed as symbols of personal taste and internal discipline.

Conclusion

Although ivory was a precious rarity for many cultures, the Chinese attributed a spiritual property of refinement to the material. Their sculptures did not show the tangible fact of wealth and power to such an extent of silent perfection in accordance with the prototype of nature. In this regard, Chinese ivory art is characterized by non-perishable reflecting beauty, which is admired to the present day. Thus, the Lahore Museum's collection of exhibits of Chinese ivory art is special in the extent to which Buddhist dogma, distribution in South Asian, and natural dissemination in Chinese craftsmanship are linked. This collection combines masterpieces of beautifully carved tusks, red and white chess, paper cutters, fans, mirror frames, and special ceremonial equipment. These items exemplify the masters of the Qing period unique mastery and great spirituality as objects masterly translate each of its aspects through a bright ivory surface.

These antiquities were generously donated to the museum by the learned scholar and collector from Lahore Maulana Hafiz-Ur-Rehman at the beginning of the twentieth century. Maulana Hafiz-Ur-Rehman was influenced by Asian art and spirituality, and he bought various Chinese pieces from the dealers in Beijing and Canton. The two cities were the main centres carved ivory trade in the late Qing period. His goal was to make these works of art available for public study and to preserve them as representations of Asia's common artistic essence. His gift gave the Lahore Museum one of its most prestigious collections of Asian art, enhancing its galleries with a legacy of cross-cultural knowledge.

The Chinese Art Gallery at the Lahore Museum today is evidence of that purpose. It not only demonstrates the talent of Chinese craftspeople but also the kindness and intellectual curiosity of those who believed that art could promote global understanding. The intricate carvings of the Buddhist tusk tell the tale of faith and enlightenment; the fans, whisks, and paper cutters symbolize sophistication, discipline, and spiritual symbolism; and the ivory chess sets demonstrate the blending of Eastern and Western traditions. When considered collectively, these artifacts show a culture that found harmony in the intricacies of craftsmanship and divinity.

The Lahore Museum's ivory relics are more than just valuable pieces of art, they are a symbol of historical and cultural harmony. They describe how artistic traditions have transcended national boundaries, bringing with them the cultural importance of introspection, morality, and beauty. They represent the artistic chimera's evocative charm of human creative skill and communicational morality at a period when no spirit would grow weary of ivory craftsmanship because of moral concerns. They are a symbol of historical memory. In summary, I contend that the Chinese ivory items at the Lahore Museum are not antiquated antiques but rather represent a composite legacy of preparation for forage rather than repetition. It also reveals Maulana Hafiz-Ur-Rehman's vision, which is spread throughout the world through admiration, literature, introspection, the pursuit of beauty, wisdom, and peace.

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