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A Look at *The Blue Lotus*
Through Language, Imagery, and Historical Setting

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Abstract

“The Adventures of Tintin” is a household name stretching across continents. Children grow up accompanying the young Belgian reporter and his dog as they escape dangers and run into exciting adventures. The famous comics have been translated into numerous languages and adapted for film and television due to the admiration of its fans. However, this beloved comic is soaked in racist imagery and language. “The Adventures of Tintin: The Blue Lotus” was said to be the moment in which the author, Hergé, ended his ignorance of other cultures and changed his outlook on non-Europeans. This paper found that to be a complete falsehood. Placed within historical context, “The Blue Lotus” takes place during the Japanese occupation of China and the readers are with Tintin as he witnesses major historical events. In comparing the French, English, and Japanese translations of “The Blue Lotus,” a theme of racist, prejudice, and intentional bias was found in the text, as well as illustrations augmenting racist imagery of the Japanese. For example, these images make the Japanese appear to be animalistic, buffoons, and manipulators. Research has been conducted on the comic’s portrayal of other cultures, but little has been done comparing three versions to find a common theme. This paper will be able to show how language can alter points of view, as well as how images aid in misrepresentation.

The paper will also use examples from the television adaptation to show how audio encouraged the same racial motives as the original comic published over half of a century prior.

Keywords: Sino-Japanese Relations, Francophone Studies, History, The Adventures of Tintin, Translation

Introduction

“Your life hangs by a thread... a true Japanese knows everything,” says Mr. Mitsuhiroto, a Japanese drug lord in *The Adventures of Tintin: The Blue Lotus*, as he sends Tintin off into Shanghai where he is surrounded by opium, kidnappers, and crime.ⁱ *The Adventures of Tintin*, is a comic book series that follows the aforementioned Tintin, a cartoon creation of Georges Remi (alias Hergé), as he travels the world. This young Belgian reporter is no stranger to excitement, danger, and conflict. His companion in this adventure, which began in 1929, was his dog Milou (in the English translation the name is changed to Snowy and both will be used interchangeably throughout this paper).

The comic strips were originally created for the Belgian newspaper, “Le Vingtième Siècle,” to promote national pride and pro-colonial sentiment among its readers. However, Hergé dressed up his characters with ignorant ideas and falsehoods.ⁱⁱ *The Adventures of Tintin: The Blue Lotus*, is the fifth book of the series, and is no exception. Its publication in 1934 reflected the Europe for which Hergé was writing and the China which Hergé was defending. As much as Hergé told the world that “*Tintin était une blague pour moi jusqu’au Lotus Bleu*,”

(Tintin was a joke to me until *The Blue Lotus*), the pattern of embellishing racist sentiments still prevailed in his writing.ⁱⁱⁱ

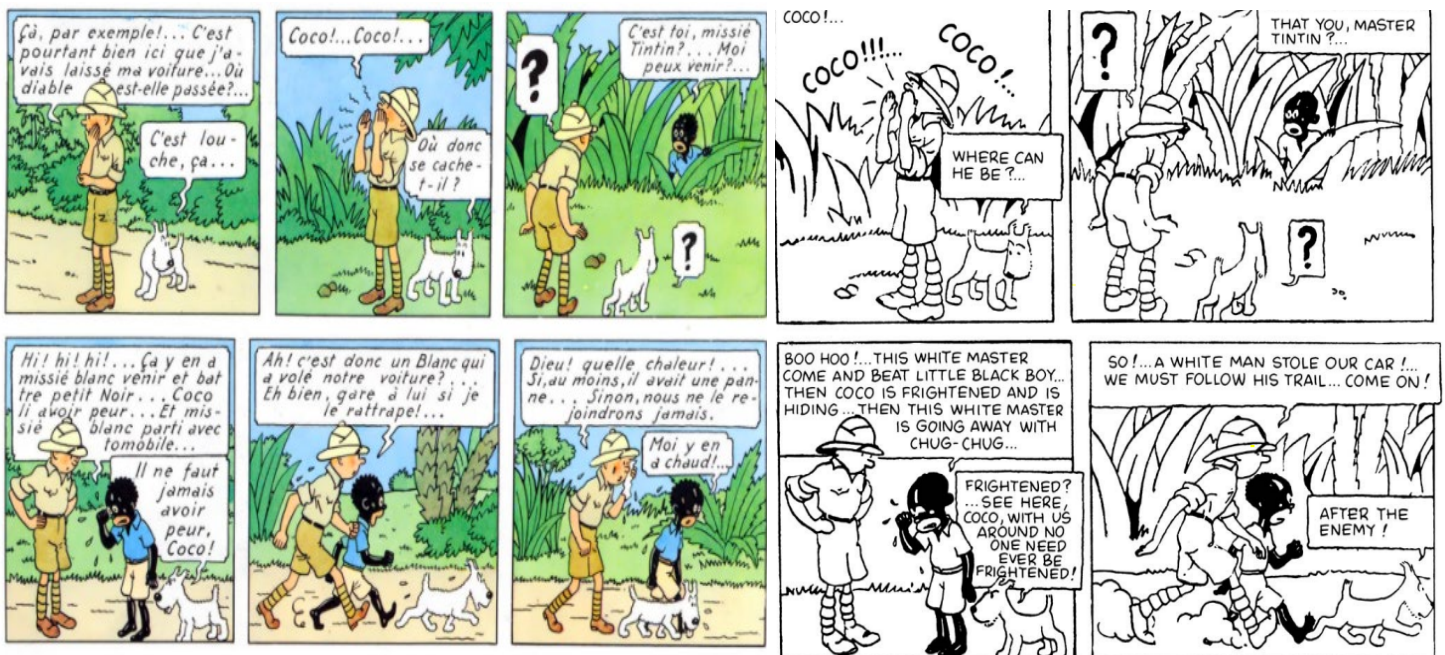
The driving motive behind this research is to prove that the pattern of racism and bias did not cease with *The Adventures of Tintin: The Blue Lotus*. Rather, it continued with the intention of villainizing the Japanese people. This will be proven by comparing the use of language in the French, English, and Japanese book translations; imagery; and the evolution of the story as it was created into a film adaptation. Experts in a wide array of disciplines including psychology, history, politics, and literature have written on Hergé's work, and have incorporated *The Blue Lotus* in their studies.^{iv} This includes analyses of the Chinese people as they are depicted in literature and media as found in Yvan Daniel's article, "*Quelques aperçus comparatistes sur les représentations du corps souffrant en France et en Chine*," ("A few comparative glimpses of the suffering body in France and in China") as well as the depiction of Shanghai in art and literature found in David Koch's "Landscape Biographies" in the chapter, "Shanghai: The Biography of a City." In addition to research conducted on the geographic area where the story takes place, the biography, "Hergé: The Man Who Created Tintin," by Pierre Assouline and the documentary "Tintin and I" directed by Anders Høgsbro Østergaard provide background and insight into Hergé as a writer and his intentions behind *The Blue Lotus*.^v Lastly, Nina Kratz's "*Les Aventures de Tintin' d'Hergé dans le contexte des événements politiques et sociaux internationaux courant du 20e siècle*" ("*The Adventures of Tintin by Hergé in the context of political, international, and social events during the 20th century*") puts into context "*le monde fictif avec le monde réel*" (the fictitious world and the real world) as she uses five books of Tintin to show how comic books can reflect reality.^{vi}

A Pattern is Set

To better understand how Hergé's work has a history of racist language and imagery, it is best to look at that which was written before and compare it to the main book in question. Beginning with the second book of the series, *The Adventures of Tintin: Tintin in the Congo*, written in 1931,^{vii} the Belgian Colonial Empire is identified as a monarchy in which atrocities toward the Congolese subjects were often brutal and horrific. When Tintin was written, Belgium was still exploiting the land and the Africans living there. Unsurprisingly, *Tintin in the Congo* has become synonymous with racism, animal cruelty, bigotry, and pro-colonial attitudes. Father Wallez, Hergé's superior at the magazine, "*Le Vingtième Siècle*," ("The Twentieth Century") desired a story that would encourage the young readers to fall in love with the romanticized idea of colonization.^{viii}

Prominently featured in this book is the use of *petit negre* (pidgin French) which is best described as a minimalistic form of the French language. As a way to create a sense of inferiority, Hergé wrote the Congolese dialogue to reflect this stereotypical speech. A prime example can be found whenever the character Coco, a young Congolese boy, speaks. The constant use of the word "*missié*" (master) preceding Tintin's name implied that there was a social hierarchy.^{ix} Even more so, other characters throughout the book address Tintin with the word "*missié*" either being used in lieu of, or in addition to his name.^x Tintin, a young teenage reporter, is not much older than the character Coco, therefore the word "master" is ill placed. The English translation reflects the same colonial attitude. However, there are slight changes in dialogue that may reflect the evolving times. Below are two moments from both translations

which exemplify how language alters impressions. Comparatively, Coco's speech in the English version is better constructed than his speech in the French version. Grammatically, the word "li" in place of "le," "la," or "les" creates an accent for the character while mocking their inability to speak the language. Additionally, Coco's line, "moi peux venir" ("Me can come?"), is intentionally left out in the English translation and Snowy's added lines displaying more concern and interest in his wellbeing lessen the hierarchy that is prominent in the French original. This is not to say that the colonial class structure is not present, but the intentional omission of certain



phrases, such as Coco asking permission to approach Tintin, and the addition of Snowy's assurance of protection, was a deliberate choice.

In addition to the linguistic examples, the imagery depicted in this story is infamous for its exaggerated portrayal of the Congolese. The overdrawn, puffy, and rosy lips contrasted against dark skin is a stereotype that connects their physicality with buffoonery and idiocy. Referring again to the drawings of Coco, his features are much harsher and more outstanding

compared to those of Tintin. The reader feels a sense of pity toward Coco not only because he relies on Tintin but also for his lack of proper speech and his childish, satirized appearance. As much as the two portray an amicable relationship with one another, their appearances create a drastic division between them.^{xi}

The depiction of European features as beautiful and righteous is also noticeable in *The Adventures of Tintin: Tintin in America*. The plot of the story is parallel to that of the *Congo* as well as the main focus of this paper, *The Blue Lotus*. In the third book of the series, Tintin and Snowy travel to Chicago, Illinois, in 1931 America. Upon arrival, they immediately find themselves in the midst of gangsters, particularly the infamous Al Capone.^{xii} The attempt at realism is notable by Hergé's incorporation of non-fictional characters. Of particular interest was the over-emphasis in the English translation when dealing with accents. An example of this is found in the ways in which the Italian mobsters' speech was written: "whatta," "getta," and "I losta my gun."^{xiii} It is wrong to assume that a racist agenda was the driving force behind the translation, since the original French version does display exaggerated phonetic writings for the same characters. However, it is noticeable that the exaggeration of accents, language, and physical features is a trend for the villains in the stories. The original French version, because it does not have the same phonetic play on accents as the English translation, uses a different method to achieve the same goal of alerting the reader when they are reading American voices. For example, within the French dialogue the Americans employ certain phrases such as "Hello Boy!" and "old chap."^{xiv} This achieves the same goal as the Italian accents; it over-emphasizes the differences between Tintin and the character with whom he is conversing.

Further along in the story, our hero finds himself following Billy Smiles to the hunting grounds of the Native American tribe, the Blackfoot, in the American West. As the scenes unfold, Hergé creates an ever-present atmosphere of racism and ignorance. First, the skin of the Blackfoot tribe members is colored such that it radiates a red hue and they are dressed in vibrantly colored feathers and animal skins. In addition to the already reddened pigment of the cartoon characters' skin, the term, "Redskins" ("*les Peaux-Rouges*"), emanates from the mouths of both Billy Smiles and Tintin.^{xv}

This ties in with the second point: the word choice throughout Hergé's work is arguably as important as the imagery. In "*Tintin in America*," the chief refers to himself as "Big Chief Keen-Eyed Mole" ("*la Taupe-au regard perçant*") but calls Billy Smiles, "Paleface-with-eyes-of-the-Moon" ("*Visage-Pâle-aux-yeux-cerclés-d'écailles*").^{xvi} Without a doubt, Hergé created these titles for the characters to encourage the connotations of European features as beautiful, radiant and charming, while leaving the reader harboring an uncomfortable association with Native Americans. It does not help when the chief then turns to a younger Blackfoot and screams "*Je te scalpe!*" ("I'll have your scalp").^{xvii} Another example of word choice conveying cultural stereotypes and impression of character can be read when Billy Smiles shouts in excitement the names of infamous American prisons Alcatraz and Sing Sing, which accentuates his evil intentions. Whereas, in the original French story, that cultural gem is not there, and he shouts the common exclamation, "*tonnerre*" ("thunder"). The intentional addition of cultural words adds to the pattern of dividing cultures linguistically and through imagery which will be discussed more in depth regarding *The Blue Lotus*.

The Blue Lotus

The Adventures of Tintin: The Blue Lotus is an overtly racist and biased story. It is inspired by true historical events that took place a few years before its publication: the Mukden Incident and the opium trade within China. The Mukden Incident which took place on September 18, 1931, is the event during which Japan blew up a section of the Manchurian Railroad and pinned the Chinese as a scapegoat, thus providing reason for the Japanese military to invade further into China and leading to Japanese occupation.^{xviii}

By the end of the 19th century, China and Japan had strong competition with one another and their hatred festered. In 1895, Japan had defeated China in the first Sino-Japanese War and claimed Chinese territory as a trophy. On top of receiving land, the Japanese acquired rights to build railways throughout the country. The Japanese motto, *Fukoku Kyohei* (wealthy nation, strong military), was the driving force behind Japan's desire to colonize and conquer. By the 20th century, China and Japan had established distrust. In China, the Boxer Rebellion, which was motivated by the youth as an outcry for anti-foreign and anti-dynastic rule, made way for Sun Yatsen to become the leader and end the thousands of years of dynasties. Then in 1915, as a way to create a peace between the nations, Japan's "Twenty-One Demands" called for rights to build factories on Chinese land and hire Chinese workers.^{xix} Shuge Wei, who is a professor at the Australian National University in their School of Culture, History, and Language, makes the claim that the Twenty-One Demands were a way in which Japan could "discipline China" and highlights that it was another catalyst in the Mukden Incident.^{xx}

Shuge dedicates a chapter in his book to the events of 1931, as well as the Shanghai Incident in 1932. His thesis argues that the Shanghai Incident was a catalyst for international “skepticism of Japan's war intentions” and that the global and domestic press played a major role in how the events were reported. Many foreign newspapers were under the influence of either the Japanese or Chinese governments. Therefore, their news reporting was motivated by either the victim, a quality that China embellished, or Japan’s perspective that they were a righteous leader.^{xxi} Historian Robert Ferrell makes note of how European and American politics were involved. This is important because it reflected the world in which Hergé lived. In fact, Ferrell and Shuge make the claim that Japan was able to occupy Manchuria without much retaliation from the “West” because those nations themselves had a long history of colonization. Nina Kratz’s thesis, *“Les Aventures de Tintin’ d’Hergé dans le contexte des événements politiques et sociaux internationaux courant du 20e siècle”* (“*The Adventures of Tintin* by Hergé in the context of political, international, and social events during the 20th century”), analyzes the accuracy of the comic books regarding their societal and political context. One major point Kratz makes is how the “Western” countries justified their own colonialist agendas and yet scorned Japan for theirs. She writes that the “West” believed Japan was oppressing the Chinese, whereas Belgium was enlightening the Congolese. It is for this reason that Hergé has no difficulty throwing stones toward the Japanese government and disapproving of their political motives.

Hergé’s motivation for writing the story is known to most Tintinophiles. When it was announced that Tintin would be voyaging across the world to Shanghai, Hergé was put into immediate contact with a man who would change him completely. This man, Chang Chong-

Chen, taught Hergé about the wonders of China, Chinese culture, and Chinese language. In the biography written about Hergé, Pierre Assouline says that the relationship between Chang and Hergé is what inspired the way the story would be told. It was his intention, Assouline writes, to oust the “savagery of Japanese occupation” and “make China familiar.”^{xxii} From these core beliefs, Hergé began to create what he considered to be his first masterpiece, *The Blue Lotus*.^{xxiii} Nevertheless, Hergé found ways to instill bigotry, racism, and cruel stereotypes against the Japanese.

The Blue Lotus begins with Tintin in India where he receives a visitor from Shanghai. The Chinese man, while telling Tintin the reasons for his visit, gets shot by a dart full of a madness-inducing poison, but only after he mutters the name, “Mitsuhirato.” Tintin finds himself on the shores of Shanghai to seek answers. Upon arriving in Shanghai, Tintin receives a message from Mr. Mitsuhirato requesting his presence at his office. When Tintin arrives, Mitsuhirato warns the young reporter about the Chinese all around him and advises him to return to India. In an effort to discover more about this madness poison, Tintin goes to meet with a man who can give him more information. Didi, a Chinese man, awaits Tintin at the spot he indicates in the letter. When Tintin arrives, he is greeted by a deranged Didi who threatens to cut off his head.

After escaping death, Tintin plans to set sail back to India. However, he is kidnapped and wakes to find himself in a Chinese house in the countryside. His caretaker, Wen Chen Ye, tells Tintin that it was he who sent the messenger to India in an effort to receive help from Tintin. Didi, who is his son, was sent to look after him, but was shot with the poison. He and his fellow “Sons of the Dragon” are fighting against Mr. Mitsuhirato and his deadly opium trade. After decoding a message from an intercepted telegram, Tintin finds himself at *The Blue Lotus*, an

opium den where he witnesses Mitsuhiro plan to blow up the Manchurian Railway. After following him out into the night, Tintin witnesses the explosion. Thus begins both Tintin's quest for an antidote and the Japanese occupation of Shanghai. The vibrant city becomes grey and gloomy. On his way to Hukow, the young reporter saves the life of Chang, and together they continue on the quest. Thanks to Chang, the lives of Tintin, Wen Chen Ye, and his family are saved; ultimately Mitsuhiro is defeated.^{xxiv}

Hergé's attention to detail should not go unnoticed, as he went to great lengths to make sure the depiction of China was accurate. Readers will find themselves right in the streets of Shanghai, posters visibly hanging on the walls. All the Chinese characters written throughout



the story are real words and refer to true situations from the time. There are hidden messages of boycotts, Chinese

pride, and quotidian postings indicating markets or neighborhood banter.^{xxv} The manner in which Hergé writes throughout the book is reflective of Chinese poetry; this was confirmed on the official website of the franchise. This website offers a perfect example, from the end of the story when Weng Chen Ye and Chang send Tintin off, which can be seen in the above image.^{xxvi} All this effort, however, does not invalidate nor justify the inhumane depiction of the Japanese.

The Blue Lotus, as a book, is full of language and imagery that encourages negative feelings toward the Japanese. In an effort to demonize the Japanese characters, Hergé needed to create intimidation or ridicule. The story begins at the Palace of Maharaja of Gaipajama in India. A *fakir* visits to tell fortunes and warn of danger. He foreshadows that danger will come

and will have “*peau jaune*” (“yellow skin”). Yellow skin being the first mention of race, is a stereotype associated with people from Asia. This comment was no mistake, and in fact is repeated when Tintin comes into contact with a messenger from Shanghai. This messenger, who is dressed in European business attire, greets Tintin with a traditional bow. Immediately Tintin becomes fearful of the Chinese man and recalls the remark about the yellow skin. Even though the imagery of the Chinese man lacks this hue of yellow, the association of the term “yellow skin” and the Chinese man is enough to make Tintin wary. However, his nerves are calmed when the man makes clear he has no intentions of hurting Tintin, and in fact is there to ask for help. As the scene unfolds, the audience sympathizes with the Chinese man, and realizes that he, and therefore the Chinese, are not a threat.^{xxvii}

As mentioned before, Hergé wanted to display how the Japanese were oppressors and the Chinese were the victims. He does this through artistic choices in drawing the bodies and physical features. Yvan Daniel’s article, “*Quelques aperçus comparatistes sur les représentations du corps souffrant en France et En Chine*” (“A few comparative glimpses of the suffering body in France and in China”), addresses how European religious media, the same genre for which Hergé was writing, used imagery of hungry and poor bodies to justify the need for Christian missionaries.^{xxviii} Immediately, with Tintin’s arrival to Shanghai, the Chinese people are drawn as poor and malnourished. The rickshaw man, who is the first interaction Tintin has with a Chinese man in Shanghai, has an exaggerated depiction of hunger and poverty. Making the Chinese appear as victims was an easy way to then villainize the Japanese characters.^{xxix}

The most important character to consider in all of this is Mr. Mitsuhirato. Initially when the reader meets Mitsuhirato, there is a startling difference between him and the other



characters. His face appears elongated, his teeth enlarged, and his ears ballooned out. There is no doubt this ape-like appearance was Hergé's way of placing fear in the readers' hearts. Milou (Snowy) asks Tintin, "*Les Japonais ça sont des bons?*" In the English translation, this same scene is depicted as Snowy asking if the Japanese are "good chaps."^{xxx} Both versions emphasize the innocence of Tintin and his companion in contrast to a force of mystery and

fright. Mitsuhiro is portrayed as a liar, a manipulator, and evil. In the world of Tintin, it is Mitsuhiro who initiates the explosion of the Manchurian railway and blames it on "*les bandits chinois.*" This is not the first time Mitsuhiro lies and ruins lives. An underlying theme throughout the story is Mitsuhiro's mission to get Tintin convicted for either murder or kidnapping. He persuades the Japanese military and government, and bribes Europeans and Americans, in an effort to defeat Tintin. All the while his assistant, who is drawn to have nuclear yellow skin and grinning teeth, aids him in these terrible acts. In the Japanese translation of the book, this man is named "*Yamato*" which is another word for Japan.

Both the original French story and the English translation use "bandits" just after the explosion of the train tracks. What is interesting to note, however, is the term that was used in the Japanese translation: "*hizoku.*" The translator for the Japanese version of the book chose this word specifically because it refers to armed and anti-establishment figures. If we put this into historical context, the Chinese people were making an effort to rid themselves of Japanese political influence through the means of boycotting and resistance. From a Japanese perspective, these were people who were all anti-establishment.

An important aspect of Mitsuhirato's character is his speech patterns. The French language is very different from Standard English. In French there is a way of speaking formally which differs from the way one would speak informally. It is with this sense of formality that Hergé adds a level of corruption to his villain. The inversion of verbs in French is the way in which a person is taught to speak at a high-level of formal speech. For example, "*on dit*" which means, "we say," would be inverted to be "*dit-on*," or "say we." There is an example of this when Mitsuhirato is mocking Wen Chen Ye's family. He says, "*Les Chinois, dit-on, n'ont pas peur de la mort*" ("The Chinese, we say, do not fear death"). These slight cultural and linguistic nuances put the reader on edge. When he sets Tintin free, Mitsuhirato, after having tied him up, is backhanded in everything he says. He is polite so that he can then be a backstabber.^{xxxii} Similar to *Tintin in America*, Mitsuhirato's words of exclamation are driven by stereotypes: "*mille millions de samouraïs!*" ("a thousand million samurai!") and "*Fusi-yama!*" ("Mt. Fuji!").^{xxxiii}

The Japanese soldiers, who appear after the occupation, are another case in which Hergé uses color, language, and imagery to further his agenda. These soldiers are drawn in yellow and grey coloring when they are first shown. The colored version of *Le Lotus Bleu* was published in 1946, and, with it, the imagery of the Japanese as militaristic was amplified by their faces exhibiting neither emotion nor mercy.^{xxxiv} This depiction is brash next to the vibrant and sympathetic blue with which the Chinese pedestrians are drawn. With the entrance of the Japanese soldiers, Shanghai loses her life and beauty. Where once she was depicted as full of color, bustling streets, and freedom; the new image after occupation shows ripped signs, soldiers occupying the streets, and the Chinese marching in a line through the gate.^{xxxv} Lastly,

when the comic permits the Japanese soldiers to speak, they are buffoons lacking intelligence.^{xxxv}

In the 1940s, “How to Spot a Jap,” was a guide for Americans to distinguish between the

THE CHINESE HAS A SMOOTH FACE...THE JAP RUNS TO HAIR....LOOK AT THEIR PROFILES AND TEETH... C USUALLY HAS EVENLY SET CHOPPERS— J HAS BUCK TEETH...THE CHINESE SMILES EASILY— THE JAP USUALLY EXPECTS TO BE SHOT.. AND IS VERY UNHAPPY ABOUT THE WHOLE THING...ESPECIALLY IF HE IS AN OFFICER!



Chinese and the Japanese during World War II. All the evidence just shown against Hergé is affirmed within this pamphlet as there are many parallels between it and Hergé’s work. The pamphlet tells the Americans that the Japanese are deceptive and will try to blend into society in an effort to fool their enemies; while in Hukow, Tintin and Chang come across a Japanese man attempting to pose as a Chinese photographer. This furthered the narrative for which Hergé was advocating — that the Japanese would try to get away with anything.^{xxxvi}

The Chinese characters were purposefully presented in a different light, both physically and linguistically. As mentioned before, Tintin’s first exposure to the Chinese was a businessman in India and then a malnourished and emaciated rickshaw driver. Yvan Daniel’s article, “*Quelques aperçus comparatistes sur les représentations du corps souffrant en France et En Chine,*” emphasizes three major “*corps souffrant*” (suffering bodies): political, religious, and medicolegal, each catering to a specific stereotype of the Chinese. Although Daniel does make clear that how the Chinese are portrayed has evolved, these are the fundamental baselines.^{xxxvii} In an effort to appeal to pathos, Hergé depicts a vulgar scene in which Tintin is placed between Gibbons, an American, and this rickshaw driver. Gibbons’ hideous language of referring to the man as a “*sale jaune*” (“dirty yellow”) and “*chink*” is appalling, and when Tintin

stands up against the American it sets a precedent for how the book will continue. In this scene, Tintin takes on the voice of Hergé and the two voices take a unified stance against bigotry toward the Chinese. Throughout *The Blue Lotus*, the reader is privy to how the Europeans and “Westerners” are reluctant to help the Chinese and are actually part of the problem.

After conducting a close reading of the comic book, it is noticeable that there is a trend in how the Chinese were drawn. The exceptions to this trend will be highlighted as well. The Chinese characters are depicted without hair, wearing either a skull cap or rice hat, and looking jolly. These wholesome attributes are accentuated with the vibrant colors of yellow and blue. Placing these characters next to the Europeans wearing dark green trench coats in the same scene allows for the blue and yellow to brighten even more.^{xxxviii}

Members of Weng Chen Ye’s family are ideal in explaining this perception of the Chinese people. Both Weng Chen Ye and his son Didi show two different portrayals of Chinese culture and people, both encouraging Hergé’s motive for the story. In the first part of *The Blue Lotus*, Didi saves Tintin from multiple attempts on his life by Japanese spies. He is always seen in blue and dressed in the same outfit as Tintin.^{xxxix} The head-to-toe reproduction of the Chinese dress provides an easy transition for Tintin to be associated more with the Chinese than the other cultures. Researchers Juan Medrano, Pablo Malo, José Juriatte, and Ana Pia Lopez wrote an article entitled, “Stigma and Prejudice in Tintin,” in which they analyzed the way language and imagery correlated with mental illness throughout the comic book series. What they discovered in terms of Didi after he was poisoned was that his behavior was “childish, irrational, aggressive, funny” and under “functional psychosis.” This goes hand-in-hand with Yvan Daniel’s analysis of the Chinese being seen as helpless and in need of mercy.^{xl} His madness was

reflected in his repetition of “*Lau Tzeu l’a dit, ‘Il faut trouver la voie’*” (“Lau Tzey said it, ‘You must follow the way’”) and “*je vais d’abord vous couper la tête*” (“But first, I am going to cut off your head”)^{xli}. Weng Chen Ye is the wise old man whose sage demeanor and poetic speech comforts and motivates Tintin. Weng Chen Ye is drawn as a man with a wrinkled face, defined facial bone structure, a skull cap on top of his head, and a stereotypical white beard hanging to the floor.^{xlii} It is Weng who saves Tintin from captivity, which conveys the intelligence and compassion of the Chinese in comparison to that of the Japanese. The subtle nuances that Hergé depicts in his characters’ actions strengthen the racist intentions within the book.

The most important Chinese character to be discussed in this paper is the young boy, Chang Chong-Chen, whom Tintin saves from the river. Chang was inspired by his namesake, Chang Chong-Chen, the young man who “*avait ouvert les portes*” (“had opened doors”) for Hergé and influenced this book; Hergé even wanted to credit Chang as a co-author.^{xliii} Chang’s role in this story serves as a liaison between the world of Tintin (the “West”) and himself (China). In the first scene, Chang and Tintin unbox cultural stereotypes about one another. “*Les diables blancs*” (“white devils”) are how Chang refers to white men. Hergé’s purpose in including this scene is to portray his cultural awakening to the readers and hope that they receive the same satisfaction that he did. By bringing together Tintin and Chang, the Western reader’s misconceptions about Chinese culture are defeated in a wholesome and childlike format. Tintin calls out the absurd assumptions about foot binding, drowning babies, and other inaccurate beliefs that many Europeans believed were rampant throughout China.

Chang's features are important to consider as well. His physical characteristics resemble Tintin more than the other Chinese characters in the book. Chang's eyes are drawn as ovals, his face is plump and round, his cheeks are rosy, and, unlike the other prominent Chinese characters, he has hair on top of his head.^{xliv} In an effort to gain the audience's empathy, Hergé intentionally stripped Chang of his "Chinese" features and replaced them with "European"



ones. With the entrance of Chang, Tintin becomes reliant on his new friend who aids him in many ways. Chang tells Tintin, "*Eh bien, á nous deux, nous serions plus forts,*" reminding Tintin that together, they are stronger. Chang's cleverness is one of his strongest attributes. It is his wit that saves Tintin from being arrested and

murdered by Mitsuhiro. His language ability is stronger than any of the other characters which is apparent in both the French and English versions.

The original comic of "The Blue Lotus" and its French and Japanese translations all show their unique perspective on cultural misrepresentation and bias against the Japanese. The storyline alone furthers this negative connotation towards the Japanese people, but the dialogue, no matter which version a reader is using, advocates for a victimhood of the Chinese and villainizes the Japanese. That is not to disregard the real-life experiences of the Chinese, but Hergé oversaturated his material to make the Japanese community become a mockery to the world.

How Film Changes Everything

After having analyzed the literary aspects of *The Blue Lotus*, it is important to consider how the storytelling changed once there was a made-for-television film adaptation. The series began in 1991 in a Toronto-based animation studio. At the end of the 20th century, political and cultural sensitivity in society had evolved. What aspects of the book the film leaves in is just as important as what it leaves out. Even more so, how does each translation — English, French, and Japanese — approach the same scenes? With the addition of audio, the audience is given a new layer of story development that is not found in the original book through music, accents, and voices. In this way, the audience is more easily persuaded to like or dislike characters.

There are many influential scenes that the film left out which changes the overall tone of the message for the story. Firstly, the scene in which the *fakir* foretells of a man with yellow skin causing harm to Tintin is no longer present. In fact, there is no *fakir* who even comes to the palace in India. Without a doubt, the emphasis on yellow skin as being evil and a physical feature is wrong and immoral. Rightly so the writers of the film removed this racist moment. Yet, the addition of cliché Chinese music whenever a new character is introduced is not to go unnoticed. Even still, the music surrounding Mitsuhirato is much heavier and darker than other moments throughout the film.

Two other influential moments which are left out are: the separation of Japan from the League of Nations as well as the transfer of misinformation from the Japanese which leads to the occupation. This is an important moment in the book as it shows the deceptiveness of Japanese propaganda, through the interpretation of Hergé. In lieu of these scenes, Weng Chen Ye explains to Tintin that Japan has infiltrated China and come to occupy her. Withdrawing

these two moments from the film was a choice that, when compared to the book, lessens the negative outlook on the Japanese. In fact, the film loses much of the context of the war. This in turn loses the message for which Hergé was purposefully writing the book — that the Chinese were victims of the oppressive and blood-thirsty Japanese. With the war being a minor character and influence on the film, the overall sentiment against the Japanese is shifted to solely Mitsuhirato. Also, Mitsuhirato shares the villain role with the Americans and Europeans in the film much more than he did in the book. This shifts the blame in the story away from the Japanese people to the lone ranger, Mitsuhirato.

On top of these major moments in the book, other key scenes that were emphasized earlier in the paper are omitted in the films. The scene where Tintin stands up against Gibbons and vulgar slang is exchanged disappears and so does any foul language against the Chinese.

Didi as a character in the film is not made to be as much of a hero as he is in the book. The moments in which Tintin's life is jeopardized and in need of Didi as his savior are few. In fact, the depiction of the Japanese as bloodthirsty is practically removed. In the French version of the film, Didi stays true to the original text of "*il faut trouver la voie*" ("You must find the Way") and "*Je vais vous couper la tête*" ("I'm going to cut off your head").^{xiv} The appearance of an accent in the French film is subtle but is made even stronger in the English version of the film. However, the words change and become a sing-song rhyme: "you will know the truth, when I cut off your head," "don't be afraid, it's a very sharp blade," and "with one small peck, we'll sever your neck." In comparison, in the Japanese version, Didi does not have a childlike way of speaking and is very straightforward. This makes his delusion, due to the drug from the Japanese, less effective and horrific. The answer to why this comparison is important may be

difficult to understand. Yet, the question of to whom this film is geared toward may in turn answer the first question. The English version is very appealing to children, whereas the French and Japanese versions cater to a more intellectual audience.

Mitsuhirato's role in the story is still that of the villain, but how he interacts with Tintin and the world around him is different than in the book. He no longer wants Tintin's life but rather wants him in jail. The quote which began this paper, "a true Japanese knows everything," is replaced with "watch your step, Mr. Tintin, there are many enemies in this city." What brings up a bit of uncertainty is the reason why the French adaptation holds onto the same quote as the one with which I began this paper. Even more unclear is why the French version says, "Be aware of the Chinese." Translating from the French film to the English film creates drastic differences as to how the audience understands the story. An English viewer versus a French viewer has completely different interpretations of how the story is set up. Without many racial innuendos, the English-speaking viewer is unaware of the racial tension between the Japanese and Chinese — apart from the basic history presented to them later on in the story. What the audio adds is another piece to the characters' development and presentation. English-speaking Mitsuhirato has a Vincent Price deepness to his voice, that is to say a dark, low, rough sound. Yet, the French-speaking Mitsuhirato has a whiny high-pitched voice. A linguistic characteristic of Mitsuhirato, his exclamation of "suffering samurais," is also not present in the film version. It can be perceived that these exclamations are culturally insensitive, therefore not appropriate for when the television series became internationally consumed. Lastly, Mitsuhirato says to Tintin when he is about to administer the poison, "*Nous sommes tous deux des gens civilisés*" ("We are both civilized men"). Yet, in the Japanese film, he is written to say, "Killing you would

be savagery.” Savagery is exactly how Hergé was purposefully trying to portray the Japanese. This line clarifies the incorrect perception of the Japanese as savages. The film uses other ways to imply the deceit of Mitsuhirato. Upon entering his office, the viewer is shown Mitsuhirato standing in front of a woman dressed in ambiguous Asian attire. Her fan, which covers her face, hides her expression. This was cleverly placed behind Mitsuhirato as a way to encourage mystery. This sense of unknown is closely tied to exoticism, which her image conveys as well. It is impossible to tell whether this woman is Chinese, Japanese, or from any other part of Asia. This generalizing of her image to, yet again, create a sense of wonder about who she is and to what side she belongs thus emphasizes even further and foreshadows the conman and villain, Mitsuhirato.^{xlvi}

The film does a good job of leveling the playing field for the Chinese and Japanese characters. Considering all the racist and ill intentions Hergé placed in his book, the film acknowledged the extreme moments and corrected them. Hearing a voice is a quality not available in reading, which is why the introduction of accents in the film places the characters



on a similar level. The exoticism of an accent gets associated with both the Chinese and Japanese characters, except for Chang. Chang in the film is full of intelligence, as he is in the book. In all three translations of the film, he uses Chinese proverbs to guide his words

when convincing Tintin to let him join. Chang’s words guide Tintin for the rest of the film.

Conclusion

The saying, “a picture is worth a thousand words,” is true. Hergé understood this as well as the power words and pictures could have together. *The Adventures of Tintin* is legendary and timeless. The stories invite the readers in and take them on to a place that is out of their comfort zone. This was Hergé’s intention when he wrote his stories. By the time he wrote *The Blue Lotus*, Hergé was already accustomed to writing about cultures other than his own. In fact, he has been heavily criticized for his poor portrayal of different peoples in previous books. This paper acknowledged the stereotyping and racism in the prior works of Hergé, *Tintin in America* as well as *Tintin in the Congo*. These books act as a precedent for the evidence against Hergé. Within these books, language was a useful tool to create a separation between Tintin and those he came across. The inappropriate depiction of the Congolese encouraged the pro-colonial attitudes of Hergé’s culture. Then, in *Tintin in America*, in the scene between the Blackfoot Native Americans, Billy Smiles, and Tintin, the wordplay as well as the characters’ attire showed the darker side of how this book was used to belittle other cultures.

The Blue Lotus was greatly influenced by Chang Chong-Chen, a friend of Hergé whose entrance into the writer’s life changed his perspective on China. It was the duo together who thought and plotted on how to introduce China to a culture that knew little about it. In order to do this, Hergé wrote and drew a world in which the Chinese people were “Western” and their city resemblant of those found in Europe and America. While creating a sense of normalcy, Hergé still showed that the Chinese were suffering at the hands of their oppressors, the Japanese. His depiction of the Japanese soldiers, government officials, and most importantly

Mitsuhirato was soaked in bigoted, racist, and overly stereotypical language and characteristics. Hergé never stopped his continued pattern of inappropriate depiction of other cultures, even with the publication of *The Blue Lotus*.

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