



The Simplicity of The Clear Line Style in Hergé's Spirituality: A Case Study of Tintin in Tibet

Aries Setiawan Satrio Nugroho, Taufan Hidayatullah ,
Zara Aziza Abidin

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia
aries@email.unikom.ac.id

Abstract. Tintin is a fictional character created by Hergé, a Belgian comic artist who was inspired by a Belgian scout. Tintin's career as a journalist leads him into adventures across the world. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method focusing on the comic Tintin in Tibet. The analyzed data consist of primary data, which is the comic itself, and secondary data, including semiotic literature and a literature review on the history of Buddhism in Tibet. Hergé created this comic based on his real-life friendship with a friend named Zhang (Chang), who is featured in this series. As a result, this story has a very strong emotional and spiritual side. These two aspects are represented by the 'clear line' character, which is Hergé's signature style in illustration. Hergé's spiritual side can be seen from his history as a member of the Catholic scouts in Belgium and later his work as the editor-in-chief and illustrator of the weekly magazine *Le Petit Vingtième*, which targeted young Catholic readers. In several scenes, Tintin often says in French, 'Dieu ait son âme,' which means 'God rest his soul.' However, Hergé's spirituality is not limited to Christianity; he also includes universal spiritual values in his comics. Tintin in Tibet serves as a medium for Hergé to show spiritual values in a broader scope, not only within Buddhism but also implicitly spreading the values of kindness and friendship. His friendship with Zhang leads him and his friends on an adventure to Nepal and Tibet, which is a center for monks to study Buddhism. This comic is also one of his works created during his recovery from depression through a visual contemplation approach.

Keywords: Clear Line, Spirituality, Visual Minimalism, Semiotics, Truism.

1 Introduction

Comics are a series of illustrated images arranged in panels so that the series can be understood as a narrative. Geographically, comics are divided into several types: European comics, American comics, Japanese comics (Manga), Korean comics (Manhwa), and Hong Kong comics (Manhua). These four comics typically have distinct illustration styles, including line art, coloring techniques, shading styles, and the anatomy of the characters created by the comic artists. America has Stan Lee as a comic artist, Japan has Akira Toriyama as a comic artist, Hong Kong has Tony Wong as a comic artist, Korea has Jang Suk Rak as a comic artist, and Europe has Hergé as a comic artist.

© The Author(s) 2026

L. Warlina and S. Luckyardi (eds.), *Proceedings of the 9th International Conference on Business, Economics, Social Sciences & Humanities – Humanities and Social Sciences Track (ICOBEST-HSS 2026)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 1029,
https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-607-9_18

The book "Comics; An Introduction" [1] explains that comics are a sequential arrangement of images that can be understood by the audience as a series of stories. The elements that make up a comic are text, sound effects, panels, gutter, and color that create a certain tone. While the objects that make up a comic consist of characters and settings. Characters in comics are objects depicted as human or human-like objects, such as Snoopy, a dog who can interact with humans like a human. Setting can be divided into two categories: place and time.

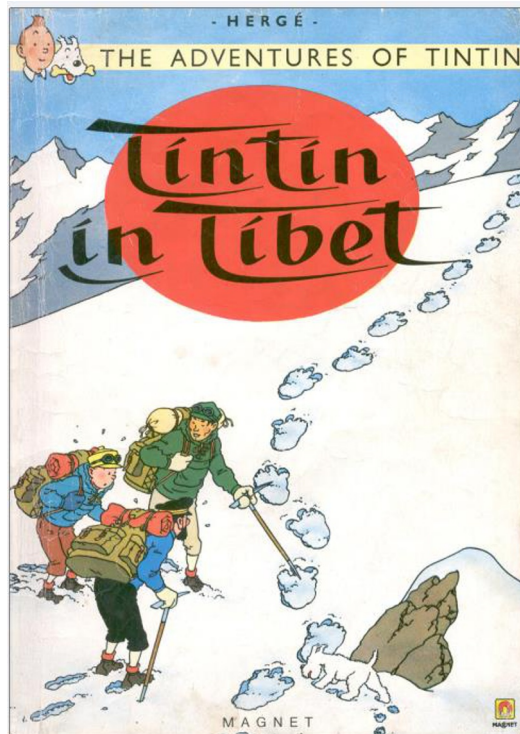


Fig. 1. Cover of the tintin in tibet comic.

Hergé was a Belgian comic artist with a unique style of illustrating his work, from designing his characters to depicting the story's setting in as much detail as possible. One of his most famous comics is Tintin, created on January 10, 1929, under the title Tintin in the Land of the Soviets. Like his other characters, Tintin is depicted with simple facial expressions and combines them with the Clear Lines technique. Tintin's work setting is designed as an intrepid journalist accompanied on his adventures by his dog, Snowy. Hergé also created other characters such as Captain Haddock, Professor Calculus, Thompson and Thomson, and a classical singer named Madame Castafiore.

The first Tintin series, titled Tintin in the Land of the Soviets, follows the journey of young reporter Tintin and his dog, Snowy, to the Soviet Union to investigate the Bol-

shevik regime. Hergé's debut comic highlights the regime's evils and attempts to uncover the truth. During his investigation, Tintin confronts the Soviet secret service, the OGPU, who attempts to assassinate him. In his adventures, Tintin always visited countries with iconic buildings or landmarks, such as the Pyramids of Giza, Machu Picchu in Peru, and the Eiffel Tower in Paris. The Tintin adventure series consists of 24 books, 23 of which were published as comics, and one sketch book after Hergé's death on March 3, 1983.

Tintin was once on holiday in the Alps with Captain Haddock, and in the middle of his holiday Tintin received a sign through a dream that Chang, his friend had a plane crash and needed help. With full confidence that his friend was still alive, Tintin and Captain Haddock set off for the Himalayas. On his journey Tintin was guided by Tharkey, a person from the Sharpey tribe, departing by land from Nepal to the Himalayas. In the middle of the journey Tintin met Yeti, a mythological creature similar to a white, hairy human. Unfortunately for Tintin and his group because they fell into a ravine and were trapped in a snowstorm, but they were saved by several monks from the Khor Biyong Buddhist Monastery. While in the monastery, a monk named Blessed Lightning had a vision that Tintin and his group would experience danger and that they would most likely not survive the mission to find Chang. The abbot asked them to forget Chang and return home, but a second vision of Blessed Lightning gave a sign that Chang was still alive. Finally Tintin returned to continue the journey to find Chang and found him with a fever and cold in a cave on a mountain called Yak's Horn. Because of his bravery, Tintin was awarded a Khata scarf, to honor Tintin's bravery in trying to save his friend.

The entire story begins with a sign through Tintin's recurring dreams, a setting that is deeply imbued with mystical nuances. The story's sequel is filled with scenes that demonstrate Hergé's spiritual messages, conveyed through visual storytelling. In the Tintin comic series, there are at least two other Tintin stories that convey a strong spiritual/mystical message: *The 7 Crystal Balls* and *In the Temple of the Sun*. These two series are part of a series of stories about the kidnapping of Professor Calculus after he wears RazcarCapac's mummy bracelet. It's clear that Hergé is trying to convey a profound message through the Tintin in Tibet series.

2 Literature Review

This research attempts to translate the visual language of the Tintin in Tibet comic series through semiotics. This series is quite interesting because it conveys the story of how the strength of friendship can be manifested in comics. In this series, there are several visuals that symbolize Hergé's circumstances while creating the series. It can be said that Hergé used this series as a medium for him to express his emotional and psychological side.

In the book *Comics; An Introduction*, it is explained that comics are a series of images that can be understood by the audience as a series of stories. When viewed from a visual perspective, what makes up a comic is text, sound effects, panels, gutters, and colors that form a certain tone. While in terms of objects, comics consist of characters

and settings [1]. Characters in comics are objects depicted as human or human-like objects, such as Snoopy, a dog who can interact with humans like a human. Setting can be divided into two categories: place and time.

Comics are a medium often used to convey a variety of messages according to the desires of the artist or their employer. One message that can be conveyed through comics is a spiritual one, inviting readers to reflect on the nature of their existence in this world. Although spiritual values are often universal in their visualization in comics, they are often represented by specific religions and beliefs [2]. For comic artists like Hergé, universal spiritual values are more easily accepted by their readers.

The simplicity of the Clear Line technique used in the Tintin comics adds to the impression of Hergé's spiritual message. The lines are simple, clean, yet at the same time show courage and assertiveness. This line technique demonstrates a lack of hesitation in drawing lines, yet can depict detailed events and incidents in each scene [3].

Beyond spirituality, comics can provide a wealth of information about specific cultures around the world. Comics are like open windows, providing a wealth of information about various things, including the culture of a particular place. Tintin's presence in Tibet also provides insight into the prevailing culture there. For example, the belief in omens or myths surrounding the Yeti, which are part of Tibetan life. Furthermore, the comic also sheds light on the lives of monks living in the Himalayas, isolating themselves from worldly life and focusing on spirituality.

One of the spiritual messages of this series is altruism, the teaching of prioritizing others over oneself [4]. Tintin prioritizes saving Zhang, disregarding his own safety. The term altruism is known in psychology and can be defined as putting the interests and well-being of others above one's own, done sincerely and selflessly. This is a form of high compassion that is the opposite of egoism, often arising from an instinctive urge to help others.

3 Methodology

This research uses a qualitative descriptive analysis approach. Data collection was conducted through direct observation of Tintin comics and films in Tibet. Additionally, other data were obtained from literature studies related to the research, particularly the semiotics and history of Tintin comic creation in Tibet. The visual data obtained was then interpreted from various aspects, including dialogue, visuals, and their impact on the global development of comics.

4 Results and Discussion

Herge is a Belgian comic artist known for his Clear Line technique as a unique identity in every comic work. He was born in Etterbeek, Belgium, on May 22nd and before he entered the world of comics, Herge was known as someone close to religion and humanity, proven when he joined the Belgian scouting organization in 1918 and left it when he started studying at College Saint Boniface, Brussels. Because when he was in the scouting organization his great curiosity made him nicknamed by his scouting

friends as Renard Curieux which means Curious Fox. Hergé was always in the Catholic academic and scouting environment until the early 1950s.

Hergé's early work was at the Catholic weekly newspaper *Le Vingtième Siècle* in Brussels [5]. He first worked there in 1925 at the age of 18, working as a clerk. After completing his military service, he continued working there as a reporter, photographer, and illustrator [6]. It was then that he began producing a weekly comic strip about Tintin, and serialized *Les aventures de Flup, Nénesse, Poussette et Cochonnet*, a series that told the story of three teenagers and a pig on various adventures, based on a play by Abbe Desmedt, the sports editor of the same newspaper. In 1929, Hergé began serializing Tintin and his dog Milo, a development of Hergé's character, previously known as Totor

In Tibet, Tintin's spiritual side emerges early on through a dream Tintin experiences about Zhang. This dream not only serves as the initial spark for the story but also as a connecting sign between the characters in this story who are moving inward and faith. Unlike other Tintin stories that are often driven by political disputes or external conflicts involving the main character and the antagonist, Tintin in Tibet more strongly shows contemplative experiences, searches, and inner drives. According to Heath's study [7]. This account is created through a journey from the arid region to the mysterious, foreign, and dangerous Himalayas. The structure of this type of space is important because it creates a reading experience that is not only geographical but also psychological and symbolic; Tintin's physical journey to is read simultaneously as an inner journey towards hope and faith.

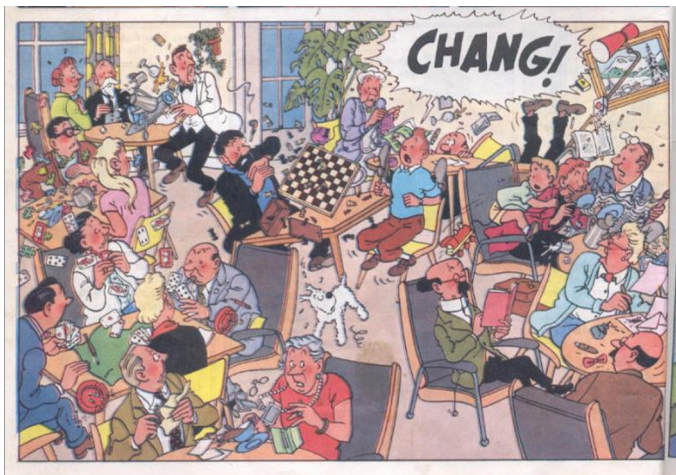


Fig. 2. Tintin's vision in a dream.

The aforementioned spiritual aspect is reinforced by Hergé's visual choices, which are based on clear lines, or *ligne claire*. According to Rahadian's research [8], Hergé's style is described as a key visual identity characterized by ease of reading and clean lines. This visual simplicity is not based on aesthetic considerations; rather, it serves as a means to promote narrative clarity and facilitate the reading process. In the context of

Tintin in Tibet, the clarity of lines creates a more intense, cold, and still pose in the Himalayas. As a result, the dreamlike portent, Tintin's determination, and his encounter with the Tibetan landscape appear exaggerated, yet they are more palpable due to the simple and clear visual elements [8].

This is in line with García's semiotic findings [9] which show that clear lines in Tintin's world function as a sign system that stabilizes visual elements and enhances narrative comprehension. Although García focuses on semiotics and its function, the argument is important for this study because it shows that in Hergé's work, simple visual aids only work on structural meaning. Thus, the clear line style can be seen as a medium that supports spiritual reading: clear and consistent visuals provide space for readers to concentrate more on the story's inner meaning, such as premonition, hope, friendship, and sacrifice [9].

From a narrative perspective, spirituality in Tintin in Tibet is a universal spiritual principle, not a formal religion. The dream sign emphasizes the idea that human relationships can enhance rational logic. Tintin believes that Zhang is still alive, even though his survival is objectively remote. This kind of belief is a spirituality rooted in inner bonds, hope, and loyalty to friends. In this interpretation, Hergé's spirituality should not be seen as a specific religious doctrine, but rather as a means of bringing inner experience into visual literature. The Tibetan landscape, the monastic atmosphere, the silence of the fallen, and the sense of quest all contribute to the aforementioned spiritual layers. Heath (2023) [7] also argues that Tintin in Tibet emphasizes the reading of the Himalayan region as unfamiliar, risky, and image-laden, and therefore this reading method is crucial to generating the emotional experience [7].



Fig. 3. Vision from a spiritual aspect.

Besides spirituality, the most compelling theme of this album is selflessness. Tintin continues to search for Zhang, even though his own safety is compromised by extreme weather, hope, falls, and the risk of death. According to this theory, Amormino, Venticinque, and Marsh [10] define altruism as behavior aimed at improving the welfare of others, even if the behavior is harmless, risky, and does not provide long-term benefits. They also emphasize that the most obvious forms of altruism often result from simple, lofty actions undertaken without strong social ties. According to Amormino et al. (2025) [10], this is particularly relevant to reading Tintin because his act of helping

Zhang is clearly motivated not by personal desire, but by a moral obligation to defend their rights.



Fig. 4. Risking personal safety.

According to the theory mentioned above, Tintin's journey can be seen as an act of extreme altruism. He not only cares, but he also translates this into concrete action by affecting himself. According to Amormino et al. (2025) [10], a truly altruistic act demonstrates that the needs of others are more important than one's own. This is what happens in Tintin: Zhang's safety becomes the top priority, even when others begin to act strangely and when the natural circumstances reveal very serious problems. Consequently, Tintin's quest is not only an expression of friendship but also an act of compassion with strong ethical and psychological underpinnings.

There is a strong connection between spirituality and charity in Tintin in Tibet. The dream sign is the spiritual center that fosters Tintin's faith, while Zhang's efforts are examples of altruistic actions resulting from that faith. In other words, the spirituality in this story is not focused on inner experience but becomes a moral lesson. Tintin not only "feels" that his friend is still alive, but also takes action to fulfill the aforementioned hope. In Hergé's example, strength is evident, spirituality is manifested in humanitarian actions.



Fig. 5. 'Light of Truth' award to Studio Hergé for the book *Tintin in Tibet* by Dalai Lama.

According to Rahadian (2021) [8] and García (2025) [9], clear lines encourage everyone by creating simple, bold, and clean visuals, which make friendship, sacrifice, and hope appear more powerful than visual effects. Based on this, *Tintin in Tibet* can be understood as a work that demonstrates that Hergé's visual simplicity is not a form of simplification of meaning. Instead, Hergé is able to convey stories with spiritual and ethical dimensions through sharp plots. Spirituality is evident in dreams, faith, and contemplative journeys, while virtue is evident in Tintin's courage that impacts Zhang. As a result, the album demonstrates that a simple visual style can be a highly effective medium for conveying profound humanitarian messages. Altruism in *Tintin in Tibet*

5 Conclusion and Recommendation

Hergé attempted to translate a spiritual message he experienced into *Tintin in Tibet*, an experience resulting from his contemplation while struggling with depression. Comic artists can use their comics as a therapeutic medium or a vehicle for conveying moral messages. This series reinforces the function of comics not only as a medium for entertainment but also as a medium for conveying positive messages about strong friendships. It is excellent for children and young adults as part of a lesson about unconditional sacrifice.

References

1. Earle, H.E.H.: *Comics: An Introduction*. Routledge, New York (2021)
2. Smith, W.A.: *The Uses of the Comic Spirit in Religion*. The Atlantic (1911). <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1911/08/the-uses-of-the-comic-spirit-in-religion/644296/>

3. Assouline, P.: Hergé: The Man Who Created Tintin. Oxford University Press, New York (2011)
4. Ricard, M.: Altruism: The Power of Compassion to Change Yourself and the World. Atlantic Books, London (2015)
5. Press, A.: Tintin dan Petualangannya Dipamerkan di Madrid. VOA; Seni dan Hiburan (2022). <https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/tintin-dan-petualangannya-dipamerkan-di-madrid/6891811.html>
6. Tintinimagination: Hergé Explained. Tintin.com (2025). <https://www.tintin.com/en/news/6411/herge-explained#>
7. Heath, G.: The acquisition of spatial and mountain literacy by children in Hergé's Tintin in Tibet. *Journal of Geography Education in Africa*, 53–78 (2023)
8. Rahadian, B.T.: Jejak Gaya Ilustrasi Hergé dalam Komik dan Seni Visual di Indonesia. *Jurnal Seni Nasional Cikini*, 97–104 (2021)
9. García, M.B.: Dressing the Sign: Semiotic Analysis of Attire and Fashion in The Universe of Tintin. *EPISTÉMÈ* 35(1), 1–19 (2025)
10. Amormino, P., Venticinque, J., Marsh, A.: The altruistic personality: Insights from research with extraordinary altruists. *Current Opinion in Psychology* 65, 1–22 (2025)

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

