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# *Incredible India.*

## Colonial Past and Global Future

*Janina Longwitz*

### 1 Introduction

The tradition of travel writing about India was established in colonial times already: often travel reports were translated into several European languages and collected in compilations.<sup>1</sup> Reading about faraway places and exotic cultures has been remarkably popular since then. The huge consumption of touristic novels helped to create a general Western image of India, describing it as an unchanged place, where time stands still, struck by poverty, but yet romantic and mystic as the opulence of past glory is still visible.<sup>2</sup>

In his 1978 book *Orientalism* the literary theorist Edward Said points out the European impact on the general image of the Orient as an “enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.”<sup>3</sup> He argues that European writing about the Orient was not genuinely about offering readers a realistic insight into non-Western societies and their cultures. Constructing an Oriental Other rather became a tool to create a European identity and to morally self-justify

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<sup>1</sup> K. Teltscher, *India Incribed: European and British Writing on India 1600-1800* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ranjan Bandyopadhyay, “The perennial Western tourism representations of India that refuse to die,” *Preliminary Communication* 57, no. 1 (2009): 24-26.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

European colonialism. A general image of the Orient was created as a contrast to European culture. The Orient became all that the Occident was not.<sup>4</sup> Reinforced from generation to generation, not much of India's Oriental image has changed in today's tourist guidebooks and brochures.<sup>5</sup>

Postcolonial studies agree on the fact that global power relations and identity constructions today are still influenced by colonial past.<sup>6</sup> Considering that the international tourism market follows the law of supply and demand, it can be expected that India creates its own identity in relation to Western stereotypes of the Orient. Similar tourism strategies have already been analysed in other Asian countries like China and Korea. Their strategy of self-Orientalism has been criticised for only reconfirming Western ideas and creating one-sided images of homogeneous societies, denying their internal diversity.<sup>7</sup>

Since 2002 the Indian Ministry for Tourism has been conducting a national campaign to promote the country as a tourism destination to a global audience. By analysing *Incredible India*, this paper aims at finding out to what extent India's tourism strategy can be compared to those of countries which deal with similar Oriental clichés. To what degree does India engage in self-Orientalism too, and how can its tourism strategy be understood as part of the global tourism discourse? Is the country's own nation-branding a sign of postcolonial inferiority?

In order to answer these questions it will be necessary to delve into colonial and contemporary Western tourism material to find out about the characteristic features of India's Oriental image. Afterwards, a look at the official image videos of China and Korea will shed light on how other countries in a similar position present themselves to international tourists. Against this background, the 2006/07 series of *Incredible India* will be analysed as a discourse performance of the Indian Ministry for Tourism.

## 2 India in Western Tourism Discourse

Over the last decades much research has been conducted on representations of India and other former colonies in European and North American travel literature, such as guidebooks, brochures and websites. These studies agree on the analysed material using Oriental images to advertise those countries to tourists. Three key studies, representative of this trend, define dominant themes, which recur in the analysed data and thus construct a specific image of India.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Bandyopadhyay, "The perennial Western tourism representations of India that refuse to die," 24-26.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); or Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Grace Yan and Carla Almeida Santos, "'China, Forever': Tourism Discourse and Self-Orientalism," *Annals of Tourism Research* 36, no. 2 (2009): 295-315.

<sup>8</sup> See Bandyopadhyay, "The perennial Western tourism representations of India that refuse to die," 23-35; Charlotte Ehtner and Pushkala Prasad, "The Context of Third World Tourism Marketing,"

The most prominent theme, which all three studies brought to light, is India's representation as timeless. This notion is applied to places as well as society. The sociologist Ranjan Bandyopadhyay quotes an 1888 document in which an "Oriental" is believed to know "nothing of the value of time, and idly waits weeks, and even months, for the grain in the fields to mature or the fruit on the trees to ripen, taking little more note of time than do the birds singing in the branches above him."<sup>9</sup> According to Bandyopadhyay, depriving India of any economical developments in the last decades, a multitude of descriptions of Indian society as stagnant can be found in contemporary travel writing.<sup>10</sup> Charlotte Echtner and Pushkala Prasad chose a quantitative approach to define patterns in travel writing on third world destinations and generated several country clusters. India, belonging to the Oriental cluster (just like China, Egypt and Turkey), is characterised as an object of mystification. "The myth of the Unchanged" is used to anchor the country in the past. Travelling India resembles a journey backwards in time. Relics – people as well as ruins – can be experienced from up close. Traces of past affluence, wealthy and powerful ancient empires and dynasties can be discovered and are shrouded in legends.<sup>11</sup>

Another recurring theme in today's travel literature on India is that of India as a dangerous and adventurous place. Especially the *Lonely Planet*, the most influential Western guidebook on India, presents the country as very difficult to visit. According to the guidebook, this is mostly due to inefficient bureaucracy, mugging and pickpockets as well as low medical standards. According to Deborah Bhattacharyya, the *Lonely Planet* uses the narrative construction of India as a dangerous place to make itself indispensable to backpacking tourists and justify its publication.<sup>12</sup>

Also prominent are descriptions of poverty. In nineteenth century travel writings, Bandyopadhyay observes many descriptions of low standards of living: "Collections of mud huts or else adobe brick structures smeared with a smooth mixture of dung and clay, they had walls seven to eight feet high."<sup>13</sup> Bandyopadhyay finds similar descriptions of poverty also in contemporary tourist brochures and magazines. Obviously there has not been a lot of change in the representation of India as an economically backward country and its indigent society.<sup>14</sup>

As mentioned above, Echtner and Prasad found that not only buildings and monuments are constructed as relics, but also people are presented as "unchanged

*Annals of Tourism Research* 30, no. 3 (2003): 660-682, and Deborah Bhattacharyya, "Mediating India: An Analysis of a Guidebook," *Annals of Tourism Research* 24, no. 2 (1997): 371-389.

<sup>9</sup> Bandyopadhyay, "The perennial Western tourism representations of India that refuse to die," 28.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>11</sup> Echtner and Prasad, "The Context of Third World Tourism Marketing," 669.

<sup>12</sup> Bhattacharyya, "Mediating India: An Analysis of a Guidebook," 378.

<sup>13</sup> Hauser (1876) in: Bandyopadhyay, "The perennial Western tourism representations of India that refuse to die," 29.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

and exotic remnants of another time.”<sup>15</sup> Bandyopadhyay goes into more detail, differentiating between the descriptions of “exotic women” and “effeminate men.”<sup>16</sup> In the nineteenth century Indian women were on the one hand constructed as helpless children in need of support from the “powerful imperial male.” Perceiving them as helpless was one part of self-justifying colonial rule. Powerless and oppressed Indian women needed male English protection. On the other hand, they were seen as “alluring and dangerous to the male mind.”<sup>17</sup> The notion of Indian women has changed over the century. They are still depicted as exotic, but rather in the sense of wearing traditional clothes like saris and veils and adorn themselves with impressive jewellery and ethnic body art. Nineteenth century Indian men were described as effeminate in appearance. “It was difficult,” wrote a British travel writer in 1898, “to distinguish between men and women.”<sup>18</sup> Their image has changed, too. In contemporary travel literature, Indian men are pictured in colourful traditional clothes, wearing long beards and turbans. In other descriptions again, Indian men are depicted as pre-modern people, climbing trees and charming snakes.<sup>19</sup>

Apart from these recurring themes of India and the Indians, there are also characteristic absences of certain topics in Western tourism literature. According to Yan and Santos, absences can have just as powerful effects as explicit naming.<sup>20</sup>

To Echtner and Prasad the missing notion of modernity is most striking. They explain the absence by returning to the “Myth of the Unchanged.” Anything that distracts from the myth must be avoided. This necessarily includes modern buildings, attractions and even people wearing anything but traditional clothes. Moreover, Echtner and Prasad found out that landscapes are only featured when they can assist in creating a timeless and mystic atmosphere.<sup>21</sup> Bhattacharyya calls attention to the absence of everyday life scenes. Also missing are everyday norms and customs, as for example the etiquette of avoiding the use of the left hand while eating, which derives from “the belief that the left hand is ritually polluted.”<sup>22</sup> As a third point she mentions a general under-emphasis of recent sociocultural developments, meaning “artistic, intellectual and scientific efforts and achievements.”<sup>23</sup>

These studies rate the analysed material as reinforcements of colonial representations of India. A significant difference between the romantic image of India

<sup>15</sup> Echtner and Prasad, “The Context of Third World Tourism Marketing,” 669.

<sup>16</sup> Bandyopadhyay, “The perennial Western tourism representations of India that refuse to die,” 29–32.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>18</sup> Hopkins (1898) in: Bandyopadhyay, “The perennial Western tourism representations of India that refuse to die,” 31.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>20</sup> Yan and Santos, “‘China, Forever’: Tourism Discourse and Self-Orientalism,” 301.

<sup>21</sup> Echtner and Prasad, “The Context of Third World Tourism Marketing,” 669.

<sup>22</sup> Bhattacharyya, “Mediating India: An Analysis of a Guidebook,” 387.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

in nineteenth century travel writings and modern tourism literature cannot be identified. Certain images, attitudes and clichés of the country and its people are being conserved and arouse an “imperialist nostalgia.”<sup>24</sup> Colonial forms of discourse are being replicated, which again influences global power structures. Superiority of the Occident over an Oriental Other is re-emphasised.<sup>25</sup>

As Daniel Boorstin has observed, “[as tourists] we look into a mirror instead of out of a window and we see only ourselves.”<sup>26</sup> Travel writing tells more about the expectations, norms and values of the author and his audience than about the destination itself. But tourism is last but not least an economy, which is determined by the law of supply and demand and identity is a product of communication between the subject and its environment. Thus travel literature can be expected to have a huge influence on tourism marketing and image campaigns of destination countries.

### 3 The Orient as a Travel Destination

A look at the official image campaigns of other countries, which fall under the Oriental cluster, provides information on how countries in a similar position deal with Western expectations. Furthermore, it allows for comparing the official discourse position of the Indian government to those of other postcolonial governments.

According to Ying Fan, nation branding is a method which “concerns applying branding and marketing communications techniques to promote a nation’s image.”<sup>27</sup> This involves creating a clear and differentiated idea, which can be transformed into symbols easily and is understood by a heterogeneous audience in different situations.

Not much research has been done on how Asian countries brand their national image in tourism discourse. In 2009, Yan and Santos analysed the first tourism promotion videos, launched by the Chinese and Korean governments.<sup>28</sup> According to their research, both videos use the same acoustical and visual techniques to conform to the Western discourse on the Orient. First, they present their countries from a nostalgic perspective as changeless, mythical and feminine. Second, they contrast these stereotypes with symbols of modernity, which originate in Western discourse.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, the videos promote China and Korea by creat-

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<sup>24</sup> Bandyopadhyay, “The perennial Western tourism representations of India that refuse to die,” 32.

<sup>25</sup> Echtner and Prasad, “The Context of Third World Tourism Marketing,” 679-680.

<sup>26</sup> Daniel Boorstin, *The Image or What Happened to the American Dream* (New York 1961: Athenaeum), 117.

<sup>27</sup> Ying Fan, “Branding the nation: What is being branded?” *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 12, no. 5 (2006): 6.

<sup>28</sup> Yan and Santos, “China, Forever!: Tourism Discourse and Self-Orientalism,” 295-315.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

ing a contrast structure. Yan and Santos describe this practice as “self-Orientalism,” because both cases show that the Orient is more than an autonomous Western invention, created to stabilise European self-identification as morally, intellectually and culturally superior to non-Western societies. Both videos give evidence that the Orient takes part in constructing, reinforcing and circulating an Oriental notion, which is rooted in European colonial discourse.<sup>30</sup>

The authors offer two possible explanations for self-Orientalism. From a historical perspective, it can be assumed that the self-perception of Eastern societies has been strongly influenced by Western concepts. In discourse, hegemonic Western ideas of the Orient have been internalised over decades with the consequence that they are now impossible to separate from these countries’ own identity constructions.<sup>31</sup>

A second approach assumes the motivation for self-Orientalism in striving for modernity. Going back to the philosophical roots of colonialism, which can be found in the Western theories of Enlightenment and social Darwinism, development used to be regarded as a one-directional process. While Western nations situated themselves in an advanced stage of development, the rest of the world was believed to be inferior and incapable of developing their own notions of modernity. After all, modernity was regarded as a unique possession of the West. Consequently, the Orient was left with no other option than to develop along the same scale as Western nations, disregarding different cultural and historical backgrounds. According to this approach, this ideology has been internalised by the Orient. Today it is visible in the display of stereotypical symbols of modernity, which have their origin in Western capitalist societies.<sup>32</sup>

Consequently, Yan and Santos interpret China’s and Korea’s self-representations as “subjugated to Western understanding and authority over modernity.”<sup>33</sup> While the authors on the one hand rate this double-tracked strategy positively as a means of self-empowerment, they do not see it as an ideal way to brand the countries’ identity as tourist destinations on the other hand. This is first because the image videos only show features of China and Korea, which reconfirm Western ideas. Second, they do not present the societies as diverse as they are, but as homogeneous peoples.<sup>34</sup>

#### 4 The Campaign: *Incredible India*

*Incredible India* is the first national attempt to advertise India to foreign tourists. Before the launch of the campaign by the Indian Ministry for Tourism, single In-

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 297.

<sup>31</sup> See Yan and Santos, “China, Forever’: Tourism Discourse and Self-Orientalism,” 298.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 295.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 310.

dian states and cities did their own advertisements, with varying quality, effort and design. India as a brand did not exist until 2002, when V. Sunil (creative director, O&M Delhi) and Amitabh Kant (Joint Secretary, Ministry for Tourism) conceptualised *Incredible India* with the primary goal to create a distinctive identity for India as a tourism destination.<sup>35</sup> Since then the team has been producing new series of adverts at yearly intervals. While photographs and headlines change, the overall motto and image of *Incredible India* stay the same. By now the campaign contains several global series of adverts, a homepage ([www.incredibleindia.com](http://www.incredibleindia.com)) and since 2009 also an image video.

In order to analyse the official position of the Indian government in the international tourism discourse, the 2006/07 series of adverts was selected because it was very successful: from 2007 to 2008 the total arrival of foreign tourists increased about 11.5%, with foreign exchange earnings in India rising from 4376 million US\$ to 5479 million US\$.<sup>36</sup> In 2007 the campaign won many international awards in tourism and marketing, for example the PATA grand award for marketing and one of four “best show” grand awards out of a total of 339 entries. Supposing that a successful campaign reaches a broad audience of tourists, the 2006/07 campaign is an important event in tourism discourse.

## 5 Methodology

This paper analyses the campaign *Incredible India* against the background of a discursive understanding of reality, meaning that society and culture are not given static entities but constructed via communicative action. Closely connected is the idea that power relations between various actors are discursive and become visible in social and cultural practices.<sup>37</sup> In order to analyse the relations between the relevant actors in tourism discourse and to find out to what extent *Incredible India* is determined by Western imaginaries, it is necessary to look at the relationship between specific communicative actions and the larger social power structures they belong to.

A large variety of actors are involved in the discourse. Among them is for example the Western tourism industry, whose discursive performances in forms of guidebooks, brochures and other material have been described earlier on. The following analysis will focus on the discursive performance of the Indian government, represented by the Indian Ministry for Tourism, which has launched the campaign *Incredible India*. This implies that the following findings are not representative for India as a whole. It is possible that there are different Indian actors from media or private enterprises for example, which follow different strategies in order

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<sup>35</sup> *Incredible India Campaign*, 2009, <http://incredibleindiacampaign.com> (accessed 21 April 2011).

<sup>36</sup> „Tourism Statistics,“ *Incredible India Newsletter* (June-July 2008): 7.

<sup>37</sup> Keith Dowding, *Encyclopedia of Power* (Thousand Oakes: SAGE, 2011), 193.



to reach different goals. The campaign as such is examined as one discursive performance in international tourism discourse.

Critical discourse analysis has been chosen as a method to answer the question as to what degree India's official tourism strategy conforms to those of other Asian countries which engage in the practice of self-Orientalism, or whether it has managed to emancipate from Western stereotypes. The advantage of the method is that it is suited to access and evaluate semiotic data – whether spoken, written or visual.<sup>38</sup> The analysis follows the methodological approach of Jäger and Jäger.<sup>39</sup>

As a first step, the overall eleven adverts of the 2006/07 *Incredible India* campaign were qualitatively examined with regard to their thematic spectrum. As each advert has the same three components (photograph, headline, text), each of these has been examined individually. Which topics are over- and which are underrepresented? Which topics are neglected completely? Which topics only occur in the pictures, but not in the other components? Afterwards the findings were related to the characteristic features of Western tourism literature on India, which have been presented earlier on, to find out to which expectations, images and clichés the campaign alludes to.

As a second step, following the logic of grounded theory, detailed analyses of single adverts were done until a theoretical saturation had been reached, meaning that the analysis of further material would not have brought any new knowledge.<sup>40</sup> These analyses reveal the discourse strategies of *Incredible India* and shed light on how Western ideas were dealt with. The findings of the analysis are summed up in the next section.

## 6 Results

The result of the thematic analysis of the eleven adverts is a total of 21 topics. The most prominent topics, which I identified, are “timelessness”, “intensive colours”, “nature”, “modernity” and “spirituality”. Looking at the three components of the adverts – picture, headline and text – individually, it is striking that the topics are unequally represented.<sup>41</sup>

### 6.1 Unequal Representations

In the pictures “intensive colours”, “timelessness” and “traditional clothing” are the most frequent topics. All photographs are eye-catching in that they show

<sup>38</sup> Ilze Bezuidenhout, “A Discursive-Semiotic Approach to Translating Cultural Aspects in Persuasive Advertisements,” 2010, [www.ilze.org/semio/005.htm](http://www.ilze.org/semio/005.htm) (accessed 11 May 2011)

<sup>39</sup> Margarete Jäger and Siegfried Jäger, *Deutungskämpfe: Theorie und Praxis Kritischer Diskursanalyse* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2007), 297-300.

<sup>40</sup> Gabriele Rosenthal, *Interpretative Sozialforschung: Eine Einführung* (München: Juventa, 2005), 85.

<sup>41</sup> All adverts referred to in this paper can be found on *Incredible India Campaign*, 2009, <http://incredibleindiacampaign.com> (accessed 21 April 2011).

strongly saturated colours, which are high in contrast. In later *Incredible India* adverts of 2007/08, similar colours are used and described with headlines like “tea green”, “flaming orange” or “coffee brown” alluding to Oriental imaginations of India.<sup>42</sup> The adverts have an air of timelessness in that they show monuments and buildings of epochs, which have long since passed, e.g. the Taj Mahal, a symbol for endless love, which Sha Jahan built in memory of his wife Mumtaz Mahal. Moreover, the pictures create an image of a traditional Indian society, with people wearing traditional clothes only, may they be simple as in the image of the chess players in Jodhpur or rather extravagant as in another ad, which shows women in colourful saris. The fact that none of the Indians in the pictures are dressed in modern fashion supports the image of a timeless India rooted in tradition. Another illustrated topic is “danger and adventure,” emphasised by wild animals like tigers or extreme sports like wild water rafting and paragliding. Sport is the only deviation from the image of timeless India. Another topic, which is depicted quite frequently, is “spirituality,” for example by portraying a Sikh shrine or a Buddhist monk.

Apart from extreme sports, the pictures conform to the image of India created by Western tourism literature. Still there are some exceptions. While in Western material images of nature are rather underrepresented, five of the eleven pictures show scenes of nature.

The analysis of headlines on the other hand shows that the topics “modernity” and “diversity” are named most frequently. “Modernity” is highlighted by expressions one would rather relate to life in Western European cities than to the timeless place, which is created in the pictures (e.g. “rapid advancement”, “camera technology” or “step-by-step guide”). In the headlines religious, cultural and social “diversity” is emphasised (e.g. socio-cultural: “not all Indians are polite, hospitable and vegetarians”). The topic “timelessness”, which is so important in the pictures, is not used at all in the headlines.

While the topics of the pictures and the headlines are rather one-sided – either Oriental or modern – the remaining texts of the adverts show a more heterogeneous spectrum of topics. “Modernity” and “diversity” are mentioned just as often as “historical architecture”, “nature” and “spirituality”. Quite striking is the emphasis of “superlatives” in nine out of eleven adverts (e.g. “the highest concentration of forts and palaces on earth”), but then again superlatives are used in most adverts to point out special features of a product.

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<sup>42</sup> *Incredible India Campaign*, 2009, <http://incredibleindiacampaign.com> (accessed 21 April 2011).

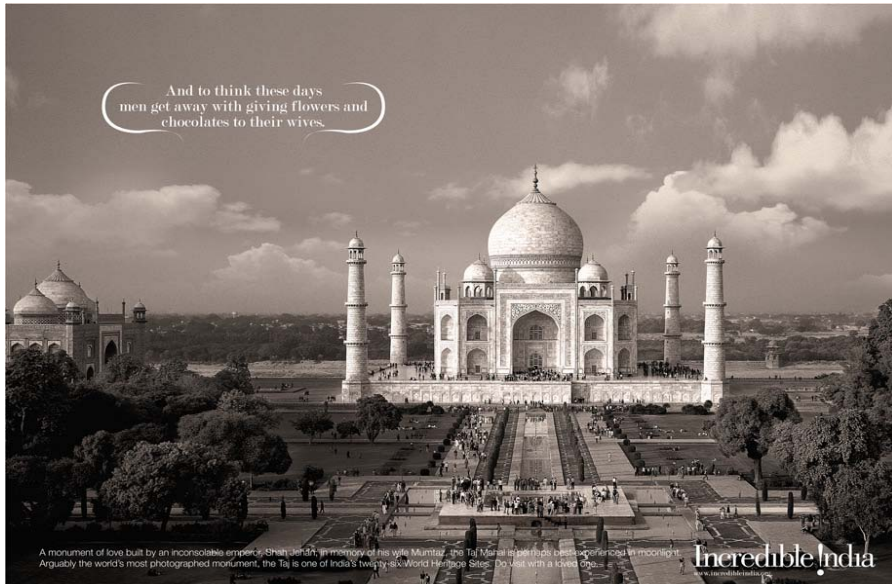


Figure 1: “Taj-ad”,  
<http://incredibleindiacampaign.com/campaign2007.html> (accessed 21.04.2011).

## 6.2 Absences

Judging from the thematic analysis, one can say that there is a strong relation between Western tourism literature and India’s self-representation in the *Incredible India* campaign. The campaign picks up characteristic features of Western discourse on India, such as the notions of timelessness, intensive colours and tradition. Even danger and adventure are not missing. In adverts like the one featuring the Taj Mahal, also myths and legends are represented.

Still there are some topics from Western tourism literature missing in the adverts. For example the prominent theme of “poverty” could not be found in the ads. This is not surprising as the overall aim of the adverts is to attract tourists. Images of hungry children and begging mothers would hardly achieve that goal. Travel literature has the same objective as advertisements but, on top of that, it wants to prepare tourists for their journey. This means that negative features cannot completely be neglected.<sup>43</sup>

The thematic absences spotted in Western writing are mostly repeated in *Incredible India*. The pictures neglect signs of modernity in architecture and in people. All persons shown in the adverts wear traditional Indian clothes, with the only exception of Western tourists. Moreover, hardly any everyday scenes are depicted.

<sup>43</sup> Bhattacharyya, “Mediating India: An Analysis of a Guidebook,” 378.

While the advert featuring the two chess players in Jodhpur can be understood as an attempt to picture everyday life on Indian streets, it is questionable whether reality always looks as idyllic and peaceful as on this photo. A big difference from the findings in Western tourism literature is the fact that modern attractions in the form of action sports can be made out. Scenes of nature are featured quite often in relation to this modern topic. These findings stand in contrast to the results of the analysis of Western tourism literature, which showed that scenes of nature are only used if they add to creating a timeless and mystic atmosphere.



Figure 2: "Rajasthan-ad",  
<http://incredibleindiacampaign.com/campaign2007.html> (accessed 21.04.2011).

### 6.3 Contrast Structures

Obviously, *Incredible India* contrasts Oriental, timeless and unchanged images with notions of modernity. Doing so, the campaign resembles the image videos of China and Korea at first view. The results hint at the direction that the concept of self-Orientalism, meaning that Orientalism is not simply an autonomous creation of the West but rather that the Orient takes part in the construction and reinforcement of Oriental images, can be used to describe *Incredible India*, too. Still, the findings of the thematic analysis do not reveal anything about India's discourse position and the way in which it deals with the identified topics.

The results of the detailed analyses, however, allow for further discussion. Here, the contrast between picture and heading, which could already be proved in the thematic analysis, becomes especially obvious. Whenever a picture shows a timeless, slow or relaxing scene, the headlines feature words that belong to the semantic field of modernity and progress: for example two old men, who play chess in front of a richly ornamented blue house – a scene, which is impossible to situate in time: today or a hundred years ago – are contrasted by the line “the inspiration behind the rapid advancement in camera technology.” Alden and Mukherjee have found out that advertising widely uses such contrast structures to attempt humour. Research has evidenced that if the target audience sympathises with the advert, the sentiments towards the product are inevitably more positive, too.<sup>44</sup> Surprising the audience with contrasts between headlines and pictures, the image of India created in the campaign is that of a witty people with a good sense of humour. This is quite a clever strategy. First, the campaign presents India as a country which combines Oriental and modern features. Doing so, it does not reject the expectations of Western tourists but meets them. On top of that, it alludes to a second India – one that knows of science, technical advancements and modern life.

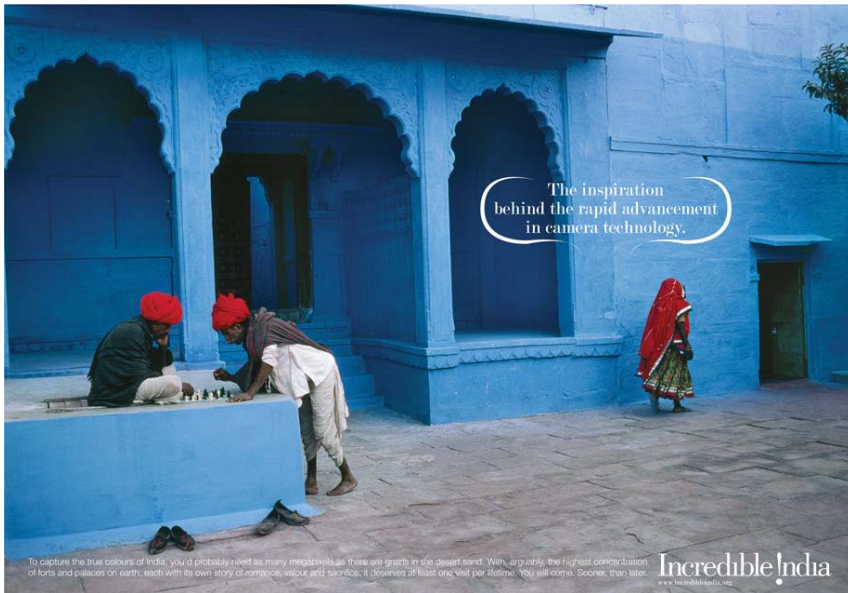


Figure 3: Chess players in Jodhpur, “Rajasthan-ad”,  
<http://incredibleindiacampaign.com/campaign2007.html> (accessed 21.04.2011).

<sup>44</sup> Dana Alden and Ashes Mukherjee, “Extending a contrast resolution model of humour in television advertising: the role of surprise,” *Humor* 13, No. 2 (2000): 199.

## 6.4 Making a Difference

At first glance, the campaign's strategy resembles very much the one applied in the image videos of China and Korea as deconstructed by Yan and Santos. Only those features are presented which reconfirm Western ideas. Yet humour makes the essential difference. Stylistic devices like irony or hyperbole are commonly used to distance oneself from a subject matter. Lines like "not all Indians are polite, hospitable and vegetarian," to describe a tiger in an endless steppe have exactly this effect. They manage to visualise a distance between Indian identity and the presented topics. Dealing with Oriental images in a relaxed manner, the campaign presents India as not caught in the binary opposition of Orient and Occident. It shows India as understanding global power structures and as self-confident enough not to block Oriental images but to use them for its own advantage. V. Sunil, the executive creative director of *Incredible India* describes the campaign as "symptomatic of a much bigger social phenomenon i.e. an optimistic and extroverted new India, eager to make its presence felt in the global community."<sup>45</sup>

## 7 Discussion and Conclusion

This paper aimed at finding out about the Indian government's nation branding directed at a touristic audience. The analysis of the campaign *Incredible India* has shown that the adverts of the years 2006/07 meet Western expectations of India. Similar to the practices of other Asian countries, which have been presented earlier on, India contrasts its Oriental image with the notion of modernity. Thus the campaign re-emphasises the country's Oriental image, which has been cultivated and hardly changed in European and Western tourism writing since colonial times. From this perspective it can be said that the Indian government engages in self-Orientalism, too. In their analysis of Asian nation-branding techniques, Yan and Santos criticise self-Orientalism for reconfirming Western ideas and presenting the respective societies as less diverse than they actually are. In the case of *Incredible India* this criticism is not justified.

First, India's tourism advertisement is explicitly not only directed at a European or generally Western audience. The same adverts, with the same pictures and headlines, were used all over the world and have won marketing and tourism awards in Asian countries, too.<sup>46</sup> In Hong Kong, for example, the campaign was so successful that the commuters of Hong Kong Metro Railways have selected *Incredible India* for the Best Poster Award.<sup>47</sup> Considering that the Orient and all the images attached to it is originally a European construction, which has been used as a means to create and stabilise a European identity by creating binary oppositions

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<sup>45</sup> *Incredible India Campaign*, 2009, <http://incredibleindiacampaign.com> (accessed 21 April 2011).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> „Kudos“, *Incredible India Newsletter* (2007): 1.



between the Orient and the Occident<sup>48</sup>, this development is quite interesting. A set of images of the Indian Other, which has been produced and reinforced by the West, also appeals to those societies, which were also constructed as Oriental Others. It seems like Oriental images of India have globalised. Western and Asian audiences, colonisers and colonised, feel equally attracted by the adverts of *Incredible India*. Returning to Yan and Santos' criticism it can be argued, that the campaign is indeed reconfirming ideas which are originally Western but due to globalisation are shared by tourists worldwide. In tourism discourse on India the binary opposition between Orient and Occident is breaking. *Incredible India* is both the result of this development and its reason. This does not imply that the discourse is not still influenced by postcolonialism. This would be impossible in itself because the past will always affect identity constructions – colonial times will always be reflected in Indian identity. Yet, in terms of tourism, it does not oppress India anymore and is losing much of its discursive explosiveness. From this perspective, the campaign can be seen as an act of self-empowerment. In tourism discourse India has become a self-confident actor, which pursues its own interests. Still it is necessary to bear in mind that a brand is not inevitably a picture of reality. The campaign reveals more about how the government wants the country to be perceived than about Indian reality.

Second, Yan and Santos criticise China's and Korea's nation branding for representing their peoples as homogeneous entities and falling short of their highly diverse societies. On the one hand, this criticism cannot be transferred to *Incredible India*, which is describing the country with "doors open in all four directions. All are truly welcome." On the other hand it can – considering that this paper proved that the campaign uses stereotypes to promote India. Stereotypes are always a means to reduce complexity by simplifying complicated and information-rich environments.<sup>49</sup> From this perspective, the campaign does not give enough attention to India's diversity, either. But then again, which tourism advert ever does? In tourism, stereotyping and romanticising are common techniques to brand a destination's image. They are not necessarily related to colonial discourse. If they were, sunsets over the Eiffel Tower and German leather shorts would have to be considered part of colonial discourse, too. Consequently, it is of course possible to criticise stereotyping and romanticising in tourism in general, but for the sake of fairness this criticism would have to imply Western countries, too.

In 1936 the American writer Carl Sandburg coined the proverb, "sometime they'll give a war and nobody will come."<sup>50</sup> In tourism discourse it seems like this time has come already. While Western discourse contributions are still dominated

<sup>48</sup> Gerard Delanty, „Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality,“ in *Rethinking Irish History*, ed. Gerard Delanty and O'Mahony Patrick (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1995), 1.

<sup>49</sup> Charles Stangor and Mark Schaller, „Stereotypes as Individual and Collective Representations,“ in *Foundations of Stereotypes and Stereotypings*, ed. Charles Stangor (New York: The Guilford Press, 1996), 21.

<sup>50</sup> Carl Sandburg, *The People, Yes* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936), 43.

by one-sided images of the Indian Orient, India has disengaged from a binary opposition between Orient and Occident by integrating both extremes in the best-selling tourism brand of the last years<sup>51</sup> – India has decided not to come. Where does India's self-representation leave Europe? Let's purposefully turn the stereotype back on its creator and ask, is the European tourism industry at present simply too backward to recognise India beyond Orientalism? What might a future politically correct guidebook on India look like? As Edward Said already had to accept, there is no easy or obvious way out of imperial discourse structures.<sup>52</sup> The historian Patrick French even compares the dilemma of the postcolonial gaze to an "intellectual straitjacket, which limits fresh thought at a time when something new is happening."<sup>53</sup> Surely erasing any traces of colonial times cannot be a solution. After all, colonialism remains an important and influential epoch in Indian history and identity. Future European guidebooks would not want to fall short in depicting the richness of Indian culture by simply replacing the beauty and glory of the Taj Mahal with the economical success of Bangalore's overachieving software companies. As it is, Oriental clichés exist alongside modern stereotypes of India and both derive from historical events – may these be ancient or recent.

Although there is nothing like a master plan to overcome the Orient/Occident dichotomy, *Incredible India* demonstrates: it is not what you say, but how you say it. If the Indian government manages to use Oriental stereotypes in a loving and ironic manner to brand the country as a tourism destination, why should Europe not follow suit? If European tourist literature paid more attention to present India in all its facets – may these be Oriental, modern or something completely different – and from different angles – maybe by offering local counter narratives here and there<sup>54</sup> –, Europe would take an important step by finally granting India to be more than a "distorted mirror image of Europe's own identity"<sup>55</sup> and learn to show true interest in a culturally diverse partner.

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<sup>51</sup> IANS, "Incredible India campaign's success raises tourism hopes", 17. November 2008, [www.deccanherald.com/content/36354/incredible-india-campaigns-success-raises.html](http://www.deccanherald.com/content/36354/incredible-india-campaigns-success-raises.html) (accessed 2 May 2011).

<sup>52</sup> Gauri Viswanathan, "Introduction," in *Power, Politics and Cultures* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2001), xv.

<sup>53</sup> Patrick French, *India. A Portrait* (London: Penguin Books, 2011), 3.

<sup>54</sup> For counter narratives on the Taj Mahal see for example: Stephen Knapp, *Crimes Against India: and the Need to Protect its Ancient Vedic Tradition* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2009); or Purushottam Nagesh Oak, *Taj Mahal, the true story: the tale of a temple vandalized* (Michigan: A. Ghosh, 1989).

<sup>55</sup> Gerard Delanty, *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1995) 90.



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