

Dear Prof. Lo,

My primary source is a series of five videos published by Incredible India under the aegis of its new “Find the Incredible You” initiative. My motive for dealing with the text was to counter, and pre-empt existing criticism of the initiative as Orientalist, which is similar to my motive in Paper 1. However, here I considered the concrete framework of Edward Said, as well as existing literature to build the motive concretely. My thesis is two-staged in that I first argue that the video avoids being Orientalist by portraying the Indian experience as a visit to a temple, and then suggesting that this “visit” to a temple constructs a sense of existential authenticity for the tourist – something that Ning Wang does not seem to account for in his framework.

I structured the motive in a straightforward “They Say, I Say” format. While this approach helped me in understanding the it was difficult to structure the subsections to ensure I wasn’t arguing against “straw dummies”. I felt it was thus essential to clearly point out which elements in the video might lead someone to harbour the view I opposed as well.

I believe that the strengths of my essay lie in the primary source analysis of memories and pointing out parallels in the video. I also think I was correct to point out Ning Wang’s link to the paper here (especially because he recommends such an analysis in his conclusion).

The essay’s weakness lies a weak motive, and I believe this is the case because I was worried about including the thesis about Ning Wang’s framework as a motive and as my central argument (I didn’t think I could write a rich paper of 3500 words about it). Clarity is one of the main challenges I faced in writing this paper, and I believe I could do with some advice about how to handle the “visit to temple” construct, and whether it is feasible at all. I also think I was inefficient in juggling evidence back and forth, and in avoiding a list thesis. Furthermore, I think my analysis of Ning Wang’s argument might not hold up to scrutiny, and my segue into discussing Wang could be smoother.

I believe I am still missing a solid Appendix detailing a summary of the various videos. If I had more time to write this draft, I would refine my analysis of precisely how a paradoxical temple-visit can serve to de-Orientalize India.

PS : I’d definitely love to have a conference on Tuesday!

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UWC2101J: Sites of Tourism

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First Draft of Paper 3

Due 11th April, 2020.

The Temple of the Incredible Self : An Analysis of
Incredible India's "#Find The Incredible You" campaign

Abstract: Tourism campaigns can be thought of as an exercise in socio-cultural Olympics (Geary 2014), the best representation of a country to the world, where the ultimate gold medal is the Tourist. But how does a tourism campaign deal with the mammoth task of representing the geographical, social and cultural diversity of a country spanning 1.3 billion people and a subcontinent, while maintaining a personal connect to the prospective Tourist? In this paper, I explore Incredible India's 2018 campaign entitled "#Find the Incredible You," and how it deals with a common critique of Orientalising or Othering India itself. The paper illustrates that the campaign lends a revered sacredness to the tourist's experience by structuring it as the rendering of a Hindu puja, thereby avoiding Orientalising itself on Edward Said's traditional grounds of Orientalism. I then draw insights about the strong connection between the video and its focus on existential authenticity, concluding that this

might be the true underlying reason for the press' obvious discomfort with current, and previous incarnations of the campaign.

Incredible India is a tourism campaign launched by the Ministry of Tourism of India in 2002. Over the last 18 years, it has published several posters, videos, and documentaries to market India through print, digital and other media. This paper focuses on one such initiative launched in 2018 entitled “#Find The Incredible You,” consisting of five videos published over 4 months. As the hashtag suggests, the videos pitch to tourists a uniquely cathartic experience in India through which they can discover an enhanced version of themselves (see appendix A for the video summaries). Each video centers around a tourist’s experience of a niche aspect that India has to offer. These include “Yoga,” “Luxury,” “Wildlife,” “Ayurveda,” and “Cuisine”. While these are themes or tropes that have been marketed by Incredible India since its inception, this paper explores how “Find the Incredible You” engages in a fresher, more sensitive treatment of the same.

All of the academic literature surrounding the Incredible India campaign has critiqued its tourism posters published before 2014, and unfortunately, the academic press has not yet addressed the videos discussed in this paper. At first glance, the similarities between the themes and content of posters and the videos is striking, and thus merits a deeper look at what the existing state of knowledge of IIC’s posters is. In 2012, Finola Kerrigan *et al* pioneered the study of Incredible India as a nation branding exercise, and use the framework of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* to posit that “the tendency to orientalise India is an underlying element of the IIC [Incredible India Campaign]” (323), adding that Incredible India engages in “Othering itself” and “internalizes stereotypes” (324). Eleonora Federici uses a semiotic

approach to analyse IIC's branding, and employs Said's framework in pointing out that India is shown as

a land of self-discovery....The idea transmitted is that for the Western tourist India is a spiritual destination that transforms the visitor; it is the place of wellness and regeneration. Thus the proposed image is a romanticized view of India as a spiritual place or as a treasure trove of 'Oriental' wisdom. (130)

It is necessary here to orient ourselves to the rubrics of Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) and his definition of "orientalism" so that we can better understand the point Kerrigan and Federici are making. Said considers the idea of the "Orient" to be partly constructed by European narratives, and defines "Orientalism [as] a Western style for dominating restructuring and having authority over the Orient" (3). Even in his introduction, he repeatedly stresses the nature of Orientalism is that of a relative, hierarchical imbalance "of power, of domination, of varying degrees in a complex hegemon" (5) between the East and the West. He sums up by illustrating that "Orientalism ... puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand" (15). Said also provides us with the portrayal of timelessness as a characteristic feature of Orientalism, which he holds to be "dogmatic views of the Oriental as a kind of ideal and unchanging abstraction" (16). Kerrigan and Federici are conveying the idea that by showing India as a "treasure trove of Oriental wisdom," IIC bestows relative superiority to the Western tourist, who is free to consume what he wants in India, and "marginalizes" (125) the voice of the Indians who are native to India.

The very title of the "#Find the Incredible You" campaign, as well as the hyperbole in "Incredible" seems to wonderfully encapsulate an India that Federici calls an exotic "land of self-discovery," with the themes of *ayurveda*, reincarnation, and luxury portraying the

country as a “place of wellness and regeneration.” It appears to naturally follow that the new campaign is similarly “orientalis[ing] India” and “Othering itself.” In fact, the popular press might already have come to this conclusion, with Reena Gupta’s SBS ‘expose’ concluding that “the branding of India as a land of timeless exotic mystique, offering up culture and commodities ripe for the taking may not be a particularly new idea, but in this case, it’s India itself that’s serving up those stereotypes.” Gupta Socratically explains the fact that campaign seems to intentionally portray India as Orientalist and exotic (i.e as intentionally deceiving its Western audience with lies and tropes) by claiming that this is a function of the campaign being “advertising after all” and that the campaign must do so to attract Western tourists and their accompanying money. Gupta clearly believes that the Western man’s power lies in his purse, and that the lust for the greenback holds sway over the Indian consciousness to the extent that it will Orientalize itself.

But this extrapolative interpretation would be ignorant of the wide latitude of agency that the FTIY campaign shows its protagonists to have. I argue that the #FTIY campaign avoids orientalis[ing] India by deliberately framing the tourists’ experience in India as a visit to a Hindu temple, and by portraying these experiences as realistic memories, not “mystic” getaways. I will be doing so in reference to Said’s definition of Orientalism. I will then suggest that this claim can be used to derive valuable insights about Ning Wang’s framework of existential authenticity, namely that our concept of the true-self can be constructed, (and by extension) existential authenticity can also be constructed.

I will first address how the FTIY initiative voids any sense of Western superiority over India by framing the protagonists in each of the 5 videos to be visiting a temple, each in their own way. Rather than images of the tourist casually “consuming” what India has to offer, the FTIY campaign shows the tourist as reverent and reflective through the metaphor of the

Hindu temple. It must be noted that rather than being defined in terms of its structure or history, the Hindu temple is considered to be “the sum total of architectural rites formed on the basis of its myth” (Kramrish 1946). Each of the protagonists shown in the five videos, from Mr. and Mrs. Jones to the Parisian bookstore owner, perform some version of *puja* (literally meaning worship in Hindi) in their unique journey of self-discovery. Susan Lewandowski considers *puja* to be “the most common form of worship today in India” (68), and is typically comprised of prayer or reflection, chants, purification by washing one’s feet with water, an offering of food or flowers for the worshipper to take back with him, and ringing the temple bell (69-70). I will illustrate how Incredible India tackles two basic tenets of Orientalism – of Western superiority and the depiction of timelessness, by showing the tourists to be performing each of these activities in order.

Each of the five videos begins with a reflection on the part of the protagonist. “The Sanctuary in Paris” shows the Parisian bookstore owner reminiscing how the Indian rhinoceros saved his bookstore, while “The Yogi of the Racetrack” has the racing champion meditating on both his travels in India and the race ahead. Similarly, “The Masala Masterchef” and “The Maharani in Manhattan” show the chef and fashion designer introspecting about their respective professions. The reflections themselves are framed similar to Zen *kōans*, using double-edged words and puns, including “when I put on the helmet, I am *still* in India” (0:08). The fact that these reflections are triggered precisely when the protagonists are going about their everyday rituals (walking up to present a dish, opening the bookstore and settling books, or gearing up for a race) compounds both the *puja* experience and the gravity with which they view their time in India.

Incredible India builds up this sanguine atmosphere with the theme of washing away the tourist's troubles, akin to washing one's feet before entering a temple. The campaign is careful here to not frame India as a magical panacea for the Western tourist; rather it chooses to celebrate the passion and verve with which the protagonists are trying to carve out a better perspective for themselves. "The Sanctuary in Paris" depicts a parallel between the rhinoceros stepping in mud (0:33), and a tired, but inspired Parisian stepping in a lake and splashing water into the sky (0:37). Furthermore, "The Reincarnation of Mr. and Mrs. Jones" shows parallels between an initial scene at the seashore with a sedate Mr. Jones and a tensed relationship (0:08), and the closing scene where the old couple enjoying the receding waves together (0:54). This is combined with "The Maharani of Manhattan" and its portrayal of the Maharani pensively soaking in the swimming pool (0:35). The IIC is successful in both marketing the curative power of an Indian experience and stressing its sacred stature for the tourist through the temple imagery, thus maintaining the balance between India and the tourist.

Incredible India underlines this non-transactional relationship between India and the tourist by presenting a familiar tourist trope – the souvenir – as a deeply personal and sacred offering given to a temple devotee, rather than one purchased by a tourist. This is primarily shown in "The Sanctuary in Paris" and "The Maharani of Manhattan." In the former, the campaign carefully positions the miniature Indian rhinoceros as a transformative reminder of India for the Parisian bookshop owner. The video shows a poignant parallel between the endangered rhinoceros, and the endangered, rare bookshop that is labelled as a "sanctuary." To emphasize this, the video depicts the Parisian placing the miniature rhinoceros in his bookshop as the first thing he does when he gets back (0:05). Finally, the video attaches a personal touch to what initially seems to be just a tchotchke through the Parisian's last scene in India - the

Assamese guide runs to hand over the replica to him (0:45-0:48). The video chooses to zoom in only on the duo's hands here, to highlight the heightened emotions of a pair of newly minted friends waiting to wave goodbye. Similarly, "The Maharani of Manhattan" makes a deliberate and nuanced attempt to ensure that the peacock dress is less a commissioning of a dress by a queen or the purchase of ethnic Indian wear by a tourist, and more a celebration of the Indian artist. The Maharani and the Tailor's exchange is quite literally just that – an exchange, of ideas, cultures and aesthetics. By cutting shots to make the camera focus on both the Tailor (0:21) and the Maharani (0:22) explaining their viewpoints, the video shows that both the Maharani and the Tailor are connoisseurs of cloth in their own fashion, and both have a say in the creation of the dress. The video doesn't just stop here though. It shows the Tailor with his final input (0:23) as he points to possibly an artwork on the wall, and the Maharani's acquiescing smile. The fact that the Tailor personally delivers the dress beyond the call of duty underscores the non-transactional nature of the duo's meeting. Interestingly, "The Masala Masterchef" takes this notion of being offering vegetarian food at a temple (called *prasadam*) quite literally, beginning with a sequence of *langar* being served at The Golden Temple in Amritsar, Punjab. Rather than open with a dazzling smorgasbord of Masterchef-esque Indian food and gluttony, the video elects to show simple food made by *karsevaks* (volunteers for a religious cause) and served to all devotees (0:11-0:15). That the food is made at a Sikh temple seems to cast a doubt on the overarching device of the Hindu temple, but this is an element of syncretism that I will explain later. This notwithstanding, the simple, rustic opening to the video forces the protagonist (and the viewer) to meditate upon food, and view it in a deeper light. The fact that all of the dishes shown in the video seem to be vegetarian (*lassi*, *roti*, Kerala *sadhya*, *dosa*, *kadhahi paneer*, and even the spiced-up desert that the Masterchef presents) underscores its sacred nature, as only vegetarian food can be offered as *prasadam* at Hindu temples.

Incredible India also teases up an explicit marker of its temple-theme in the closing outro of each video. Thus, Incredible India insures itself from accusations of portraying Western superiority by constructing the tourist's Indian experience as sacred, enlightening and almost reverential temple visit, while taking great pain to avoid specifying the deity at the temple (and the possibility that one might construe the video to be patronizing Western tourists as ignorant or callous).

However, there are side-effects of portraying each element in a video as a sacred component, and the inevitable charge of engaging in hyperbolic, exotic representation when labelling a campaign "Incredible India". This side-effect is the second tenet of Orientalism according to Said— one where the Orient is shown as "timeless." Incredible India subtly employs the device of memories to counter the impression of India as an exotic and timeless land. This forms the bulk of the montages shown, and the devices used to depict a sense of flux include framing the videos as memories, and showing signs of syncretism through them.

Incredible India films each video as the memory of the protagonist in it, by incorporating the concept of the reflective flashback (as underlined above), fast-paced sequences and sharp-cuts and montages. The sequences in India are frenzied, resembling both passionate memories arising from a train of thoughts, as well as a frenzied, diverse India as well. Interestingly, the transitions between scenes are not smooth at all. There is an abrupt fade to black, and then the explosion of colours onto the screen, to simulate the blinking of the eye (0:50-0:53 in "The Masala Masterchef" is a good illustration of this technique). The campaign chooses to show memories of tourists with perspectives and narratives run by the tourists rather than a virtual slideshow of India's exotic diversity dictated by a mysterious,

invisible narrator. However, the memories seem to show the protagonists themselves, and this is done to emphasize the reflexive nature of the Indian experience, and to humanize the tourists shown. This results in assigning a realistic feeling to the videos, and thus the campaign is able to induce a potential tourist to put himself in another tourist's footsteps, while avoiding being too prescriptive. Memories of the past lend a concrete feeling to the video, and the campaign thus avoids painting India as exotic.

The campaign also employs syncretism to showcase India as a nation in flux, and not a ossified, timeless place. The campaign portrays this with aerial shots of Rajasthan's forts and palaces in "The Maharani of Manhattan" (0:12 and 0:16), which combine aspects of Mughal and Hindu architecture. It also includes depictions of Rajasthani miniature paintings, which incorporate both Persian and Gujarati styles, in palaces (0:28) and in small studios (0:31). Even the loan words "Maharani" and "Masala" imply a sense of linguistic exchange. The campaign rounds off this thread of cultural change and newness in "The Reincarnation of Mr. and Mrs. Jones," with Mrs. Jones reflecting that *ayurveda* "keep[s] a culture centuries old, forever young". The reincarnation theme serves to underscore the fact that India is not a ossified, timeless relic to be marveled at in museums – it is a living and breathing entity with a voice of its own.

The "Find the Incredible You" initiative thus employs rich, subtle imagery of the Hindu temple and nuanced devices of the memory in a determined effort to shake off previous accusations of the Incredible India campaign being "Orientalist." The marked change in the way India is portrayed through the eyes of the traveler can probably be ascribed to the Ministry of Tourism changing the advertising firm from New York firm Ogilvy & Mather to McCann Worldwide in 2015. The result has been a clear focus on marketing based on what

Ning Wang calls “existential authenticity” (358). I believe that this analysis of the “Find the Incredible You” initiative can be used to extend Wang’s framework and fill an ambiguous disconnect in it.

The “Find the Incredible You” initiative is clearly the embodiment of employing Wang’s version of existential authenticity, which “refers to a potential existential state of Being that is to be activated by tourist activities” (352). Wang believes that in most touristic contexts, “tourists are rather in search of their authentic selves with the aid of activities or toured objects” (360). He thus identifies a key motivator or driver behind the tourist – something which he is sure tourism campaigns will play on, leading him to suggest “reviews of tourist marketing documents (365)”. The “Find the Incredible You” initiative promises a “free, spontaneous” (361) experience that Wang believes tourists yearn for, and the incredulity in its very title aims to emphasize what Ning Wang calls the “extra-mundane” here, so that the potential tourist gets an amusing contrast to their everyday life. The “Find the Incredible You” initiative seems to be the poster-boy of Wang’s framework.

However, let us take a step back, reconsider the tourists’ quest for the “authentic self”, and ask what this term really means. Wang believes that

[a] sense of “authentic self” involves a balance between two parts of one’s Being: reason and emotion, self-constraint and spontaneity, Logos and Eros, or what Freud calls the “reality principle” and the “pleasure principle” (Wang 1996). (360)

While Wang clearly delineates the concept of the “authentic self”, he does not offer us an explanation for how, and why a person would think that they in “balance” with their “reason and emotion.” Put simply, he does not volunteer an answer for how we derive a working definition for the “balanced self” – is it simply inherent to each of us in our “emic

perspective” (360) or can it be shaped and constructed by entities such as tourism campaigns? Using the above analysis of Incredible India’s new initiative, I believe that the answer is the latter. The framing of the videos as “temple visits” itself can be thought to be a marker that constructs in the tourist’s mind a connotations of harmony, auspiciousness and of finding the real balanced self. This interpretation of the campaign seems to imply our notion of the “authentic self” can be constructed, and by extension, so can our notion of “existential authenticity.” Thus, similar to object-related authenticity, existential authenticity could also have objective and constructive interpretations of human experiences.

I have argued that the Incredible India campaign’s “Find the Incredible You” initiative is instructive in terms of how it subtly constructs an experience of a tourist visiting a temple to connect with their true self. I have shown that this approach portrays both India and the tourist in a positive light, and prevents the initiative from indulging in Orientalism and Othering itself to attract tourists. Finally, I have shown that this approach might be extended to Ning Wang’s framework of existential authenticity. I suggest that one can extrapolate from these findings to investigate whether it is in the nature of all modern tourism campaigns to similarly construct an aura of existential authenticity for the Western tourist.

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Dear Mayank,

Your final paper engages with the most recent incarnation of the *Incredible India* marketing campaign: launched in 2018, this version has the specific tagline “Find the Incredible You,” and chiefly consists of five promo videos, each of which shows tourists learning and gaining from some aspect of Indian culture. This draft is a promising one, in large part because it is rightly anchored by an analysis of the videos, from which you derive a novel insight.

You thus have a clear primary text to work with, though you can provide a bit more information and **orientation** in the body of your essay. I say “body of your essay” because you have indicated that you will attach an appendix containing summaries of the five videos. Additionally, you do sum up the recurring theme (“the videos pitch to tourists a uniquely cathartic experience in India through which they can discover an enhanced version of themselves”). That’s good, but in your introduction, you should still give us more information: certainly the titles of the five videos, and possibly one-line summaries of each.

Your draft does a good job of establishing a **motive**. You first explain that, while there have been academic critiques of the campaign, these were published before 2014, and presumably concern earlier versions of the campaign. You also explain a framework that these scholars use, Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, and do so because you too will later draw on it. You then conclude the motive section by noting that there is a critique of the 2018 campaign in the popular press (though the way you mention it in the body of your essay, without the author’s name, makes it difficult to locate the work in your bibliography). This engagement with Reena Gupta’s work is quite brief. I suspect that it is because you wanted to pay more attention to “scholarly sources” (Federici, Kerrigan), but I think the fact that Gupta’s article is more recent, and specifically about the 2018 campaign, should mean that her views deserve a bit more time and attention. So you can make these small adjustments, and perhaps also include some slightly bigger picture responses to the existing criticism: for instance, how they don’t seem to pay much attention to the content or structure of the videos (which you will go on to do).

Your **thesis** has several (connected) parts to it. In the first, you “argue that the #FTIY campaign avoids orientalising India by deliberately framing the tourists’ experience in India as a visit to a Hindu temple” (5). You go on to explain, with the help of Susan Lewandowski, a Hindu temple (and thus visiting it) does not have to be literal, but can consist of daily rituals of worship. But because of that, I wonder if your thesis statement should already signal that “visit to a Hindu temple” is a metaphorical concept, or if you could consider replacing the phrase with *puja* (e.g., “the campaign deliberately frames each tourist’s experience as a form of *puja*, to the point of each experience following the typical structure of such worship”). Expression aside, the way you make this part of the argument (6-8) is convincing, via **analysis** of moments from the five videos that help us see their common structure and logic.

The subsequent sections of your argument, and how you transition to them, is a bit bumpier. Above, I only partially quoted your thesis statement, which continues by talking about how the videos “portra[y] these experiences as realistic memories, not ‘mystic’ getaways” (5). I see how the paragraphs about “syncretism” and “timelessness” develop this point, but you can align the vocabulary a little more to make the roadmap clearer. Second, and more crucially, the essay then goes into a discussion of Ning Wang’s notion of existential authenticity. At the simplest level, in your introduction, the notion pops up a bit too abruptly. But even the actual moment of transition in the body of your essay is a little too sudden, and it makes the closing discussion about Wang seem like a swerve away from your primary text. You should try linking the parts a bit more explicitly. For instance, perhaps it’s the case that you’ve proven that the videos are very thoughtful about making each tourist experience akin to *puja*, and, as you say, “the result has been a clear focus on marketing based on what Ning Wang calls “existential authenticity” — but this must raise the question of whether this kind of marketing of existential authenticity *is* a form of Orientalism. Something like that might better connect the parts of your argument. Otherwise, there is a risk that the essay reads like it ends by tackling a slightly different question (“Is existential authenticity constructed?”), one that is about a different primary text (Ning Wang’s essay, instead of the videos).