Lost in Transmission: Searching Bits of Japan across (Cyber)Space

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the processes through which “imagined Japan” is discovered and transmitted outside the nation through the use of online media. My interest in this topic arose from a trivial experience when Google suggested to auto-complete my search box with the phrase, “Japan is so weird,” simultaneously offering a variety of other options like cool and perverted. How exactly had Japan become reconstructed in the cyberspace as a weird, cool, and perverted place? This episode underscores the enigmatic power new media may have over national imaginary.

The internet is an interesting locus to observe the interaction between individuals cultivating certain images of Japan, and the larger Google machine that facilitates transmissions of such images. If enough users upload fragments of weird-Japan media in the form of texts and images, it will eventually perpetuate within the search engine algorithm. This allows the phrase to emerge with a strange sense of authority, that Japan is indeed weird.

My research focuses on tourists as the particular agents who participate in the circulation of these bits and pieces of Japan. Tourism practice involves a hermetic process between pre-travel imagination and post-travel memory; tourists cultivate a certain fantasy about the destination, and it is precisely this predetermined imagination that they actively choose to consume and remember. I will look at online travel blogs and albums as one of the main platforms where certain memories of imagined Japan is archived, discovered and eventually transmitted towards other digital consumers as well as future travelers to Japan.